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Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*: an Analysis

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To my parents,
with gratitude

"Life and Death are mysterious states, and we know little of the resources of either"
(Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, "Carmilla")

"People are unaware that spirits even exist, let alone that angels are present with them"
(Emanuel Swedenborg)

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Introduction

Victorian Gothic was probably one of the most peculiar and culturally vibrant literary periods, during which several timeless masterpieces came out. The iconic Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, novellas like R.L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, and novels like Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, or Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* inspired and still inspire authors and directors worldwide. One of these important Gothic writers is surely Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu.

Unfortunately, unlike the aforementioned authors, Le Fanu's works are perhaps not always given the right importance, however they are rare gems and some of them are true masterpieces of Gothic literature. The author perfectly intermingles the typical sensational characteristics of horror fiction, which represent the protagonists' subconscious fears, with modern psychological and sociological analysis that reveals the writer's great sensitiveness. Some of Le Fanu's works, like “Carmilla” or “Green Tea”, can almost be considered pre-Freudian case studies and one of his most famous characters, Dr. Hesselius, strongly reminds of an *ante litteram* psychoanalyst.

Moreover, Le Fanu's works, especially his late ones, explicitly deal with society and its ills. Through the use of Gothic and horror features, the author depicts the distresses and the issues of an increasing industrialised society, which is continuously changing and modernising. Le Fanu deals with political issues, like the Anglo-Irish question or the rise of Dissident confessions, and with individual existential and religious crisis, which can easily lead to self-destructive behaviours or even suicide.

The aim of this dissertation is, therefore, to highlight Le Fanu's important contribution to Victorian Gothic, through the analysis of his very peculiar and

successful novel *Uncle Silas*. In the first chapter, it is provided an overall analysis of the author's life, works and poetics, while the second chapter deals with all the multifaceted aspects of the aforementioned novel.

At a first glance, *Uncle Silas* seems a traditional sensational piece of Gothic fiction, whose plot rotates around a haunted heroine that needs to be saved from her evil uncle. But, in fact, the characters and the plot hide much more than that. For example Maud Ruthyn's fragile and nervous character does not simply obey to narrative strategies. It is the direct consequence of parental neglect, lack of education and mistreatment by abusive characters, which seem to be the main cause for her tendency to nervous diseases. Moreover, her ordeal has a precise formative purpose: it helps Maud overcome her fears, in order to become a mature adult.

In a similar way, Silas Ruthyn is not only a wicked, greedy villain, who seeks power or money. Silas is a tortured man, ruined by his own vices, a De-Quincey-like character, who seeks to escape his sad, decayed life through opium. This character allows Le Fanu to deal with the modern issue of opium use and addiction, which was quite widespread in the mid-century.

Similarly to the case of Silas, many characters of the novel represent modern questions and problems. For example, Austin Ruthyn and his powerlessness in society may symbolise the fall of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and the character of doctor Bryerly permits Le Fanu to deal with Swedenborgianism, its growing popularity and the general sense of fear it provoked in society.

Since Swedenborg's theories are a fundamental topic of the novel, the third chapter of this essay focuses on the interesting figure of Emanuel Swedenborg, the main aspects of his theological doctrine and their influence in the nineteenth-century literature and culture. This chapter eventually analyses Swedenborgianism's role in *Uncle Silas* and the peculiar way in which Le Fanu deals with it in this novel. Unlike Le Fanu's 'Swedenborgian' short tales, in *Uncle Silas* Swedenborgianism is symbolically hidden in

the plot. It represents an alternative reading key of the novel, according to which the plot's events take place twice: once in the earthly world and once in the spiritual dimension. This conveys characters liminal and ambiguous features, since it is very difficult to distinguish humans from ghosts. Moreover, Swedenborgianism enriches the apparently traditional Gothic plot, giving it an incredibly original and unique tone.

Chapter I: Life and Works of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

1.1. Le Fanu's Life

Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu was born on the 28th August 1814 at 45 Lower Dominick Street, in Dublin. He was the eldest son of Emma Lucretia Dobbin and Thomas Philip Le Fanu, a Protestant Irish Dean, who was a chaplain and the rector of Abington, in the Limerick County. Joseph's siblings were William Richard, who became an architect and Catherine Frances Le Fanu, who continued the Le Fanu line and from whom all the current members of the Le Fanu family descend.

Joseph's family was quite peculiar for two reasons. Many of its components were men and women of letters; his mother was a writer, his grand-uncle was the famous dramatist Richard Brisley Sheridan and his grandmother was Alicia Sheridan, an author too. In addition, the Sheridan family descended from French Protestant Huguenots, who fled from France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes and, in Ireland, the family became part of the Protestant Anglo-Irish Ascendancy.

Shortly after Le Fanu's birth, his family moved to Phoenix Park, in Dublin, because his father was appointed chaplain of the Royal Hibernian Military School. So, already as children, Joseph and his siblings became aware of their Anglo-Irish origins, they experienced the manoeuvrers of the Anglo-Irish army and they even witnessed some duels. This early experience probably contributed to the formation of Le Fanu's Tory view and of his belief that Ireland should remain under British rule. In 1826, Joseph's family moved to Abington, in County Limerick, outside Dublin, because his father was nominated Dean of Emly and rector of Abington. In that period he also became a

Church of Ireland clergyman.

The years Le Fanu spent in Abington were very difficult. In 1831, the Tithe Wars broke out.[1] It was a period of assassinations, harassments and acts of violence, which the Anglo-Irish classes thought to be incontrovertible proofs of the Catholic barbarism. Thomas Philip, who Le Fanu did not see simply as a father, but as the embodiment of the endangered establishment,[2] was a Protestant Clergyman and member of the Ascendancy, so Le Fanu's family was continually threatened. Therefore they decided to self-segregate at home. The menaces, the deaths and the violence he witnessed in this period, were very traumatic experiences for Joseph. Indeed many of his works deal with the Irish conflicts, especially his two historical novels *The Cock and the Anchor* and *The Fortunes of Colonel Torlogh O'Brien*. Moreover, his works often depict a great sense of anxiety towards the Anglo-Irish domain, which in his narration has usually the shape of ghosts, vampires or haunting demons.

As a boy, Le Fanu was educated privately by a tutor named Stinson, but his teachings were not really effectual. However, Le Fanu had free access to the father's great library so, since he was curious and very interested in culture, much of his knowledge was self-taught. In this period, he also read Gothic novels, books on ghosts and demonology and much eighteenth-century literature, which influenced deeply his literary production and encouraged him to start writing fiction.

Joseph and his brother were enrolled in Trinity College, where the former studied law, took honours in Classics and was an active political debater. After college, Le Fanu went to London to study at the King's Inns, i.e. a law school, and he eventually was called to the Irish Bar in 1839. He did not want to practice, because he wanted to follow his literary vocation, so he became a journalist. From 1841 to 1870, he owned and was the editor of a Protestant magazine called *The Warder*, in 1842 he bought *The*

1 G.W. Crawford, *J. Sheridan Le Fanu. A Bio-Bibliography,* Westport (CT), Greenwood Press, 1995, pp. 3,4,5.
2 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, Dublin, The Lilliput Press, 1991, pp.30,45.

Protestant Guardian and he also acquired part of the *Dublin Evening Packet* and *The Evening Mail*. During his life, he wrote dozens of articles for his newspapers, however many of them are still unidentified, because they were published anonymously. Beyond journalism, another passion which dominated his whole life, was politics. He always remained active in public debates and in 1851 he even attempted to enter in the local Tory party of County Carlow, but failed.

His 'true love', however, was literature. He started writing poems at the age of fifteen and he kept on writing fiction until the very end, indeed he finished his last novel *Willing to Die* shortly before his death.

The author began his literary career contributing to *The Dublin University Magazine*, where he published humorous ballads, ghost stories and tales of mystery and murders,[3] including "The Ghost and the Bone-Setter". But, at least initially, his literary activity was not his main concern.

The late 1830s and 1840s were traumatic years for Le Fanu. In 1838, his cousin Frances committed suicide, his sister Catherine, who was ill most of her life, died in March 1841. Because of these sad events, he became very melancholic, anxious and depressed. He thought that the outer world had nothing to offer him and there was no escape from his immense sorrow. In 1843, after a period of courtship, he married Susanna Bennet, the daughter of a famous Dublin lawyer. The couple had four children: Eleanor Frances (born in 1845), Emma Lucretia (in 1846), Thomas Philip (in 1847) and George Brinsley (in 1854). One of Le Fanu's children's playmate was Oscar Wilde, who was born in 1854, like Joseph's youngest son.[4]

The early years of Joseph and Susanna's marriage were very happy, but soon after their wedding, they started having financial problems. Their family was expanding and Le Fanu's newspaper works were not as successful as he thought, moreover he was suited because of an editorial he had written in one of his newspapers.[5] So, he decided

3 G.W. Crawford, *J. Sheridan Le Fanu. A Bio-Bibliography*, cit., pp. 3-5.
4 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., pp. 7,55,60,109,113,115,125.
5 G.W. Crawford, *J. Sheridan Le Fanu. A Bio-Bibliography*, cit., p.6.

to ask his brother William to borrow him money and he contracted mortgages. This is why Le Fanu's male characters are very often in debt; think at Mark Shadwell, who figures in *A Lost Name*, Francis Ware, in *Willing to Die* and Silas Ruthyn, the protagonist of *Uncle Silas*.

In the same period, four of Susanna's siblings and the couple's best man's daughter died. Joseph and his wife were very shocked by these deaths and they frequently fell ill. However, despite those difficulties, the couple did not split up because they were very closed to one another.[6] In his private diary, Le Fanu wrote that he "loved her almost to idolatry. She was always doubting & sometimes actually disbelieved [his] love, though [he] was then both declaring and showing it day & night".[7]

In the spring of 1851, Susanna started to suffer from psychosomatic disorders, mood swings and irascible temper. After the death of her father, her brother George and two grandchildren, these ailments soon turned into hysterical fits. Susanna, like Joseph, had always been very religious, but she started to question her faith, she had deep existential crisis and, because of her doubts, she was afraid to be damned and to be corrupting her soul. These paranoid thoughts soon became religious manias.[8] This is clearly reported in Le Fanu's diary:

> A little before the death of her beloved father […] my darling's mind was harassed with incessant doubts about the truth of revealed religion. She was acute in detecting apparent weakness, & quick in suggesting difficulties […] although I thought I had the answer to her objection, yet her attention generally failed & passed off to some other difficulty before I had completed my reply. It grieved me to see my darling's faith unsettled & obscured.[9]

6 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., pp. 59,122.
7 The Private Diary of J.S. Le Fanu, 18th May 1858, transcribed and published by Jean Lozes in "Fragment d'un journal intime de J.S. Le Fanu", in *Caliban Année 1974, Vol. 10, No. 1,* 1974, pp. 153-164 quoted in W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.131.
8 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland,* cit., pp. 122,125,126,127,129.
9 The Private Diary of J.S. Le Fanu, 18th May 1858, transcribed and published by Jean Lozes in "Fragment d'un journal intime de J.S. Le Fanu", quoted in W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.127.

Moreover, Susanna became obsessed with morbid thoughts and fears about death. In his diary, Le Fanu reports that:

> If she took leave of anyone who was dear to her, she was always overpowered with an agonizing frustration that she should never see them again. If anyone she loved was ill, though not dangerously, she despaired of their recovery.[10]

His diary's language reminds of the narrator of Le Fanu's "The Mysterious Lodger"; after the loss of two children, the protagonist's wife cannot pray and is extremely afraid of death. Her husband feels helpless and guilty, because he would like to help her but he can do nothing to restore her serenity.

On the 26th April 1858, Susanna had severe hysterical attacks and died two days after. She was not quite thirty-five years old.

Despite the tragedies and difficulties he had to face, Le Fanu never questioned his religious belief. He had a strong and orthodox Anglican faith with Calvinist traits, but ever since his wife's illness, he neglected Church, and after Susanna's death, he started to put in discussion his prayers' efficacy, the nature of passions and the action of the determinist fate. Indeed, in his fiction, there are many examples of attenuated faith, religious crisis and anxieties.

Beyond his faith, he also put in question every single decision and thought; he asked himself whether the right doctors were chosen for his wife, if the couple's religious scepticism influenced their children, and he felt irrationally guilty for Susanna's death.[11] Moreover, he continued torturing himself with obsessive thoughts; he believed he had been an inadequate husband, because he was not able to provide her a happy life and he could not reassure her and show her his love sufficiently, so he was the cause for her tormenting insecurities.[12]

10 *Ibid*.

11 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., pp. 70,127,128,129,132,133.

12 J.J. Cerullo, "Swedenborgianism in the Works of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu: Desocialization and the Victorian Ghost Story", in *Swedenborg and his Influence*, ed. E.B. Glenn, J.E. Brock, Bryn Athyn (PA), The Academy of the New Church, 1988, p.98.

After Susanna's passing, he lived a period of depression, during which he started to be interested in the works and theories of Emanuel Swedenborg, an eighteenth-century occultist and mystic, who claimed he could talk to spirits. Le Fanu soon became involved in The New Jerusalem Church, the church grounded on the Swedenborgian belief. Le Fanu had always been very fascinated by occultism and spiritualism, so he was attracted by Swedenborgianism because of its esoteric aspects.

It is reported that he wanted to meet no one and he self-segregated in his home. He would go out after dark to purchase old books about occultism and, because of this weird behaviour, the Dublin society nicknamed him 'the invisible prince'. He neglected his literary career too; from 1853 to 1861, he wrote no fiction or poetry. However, all of this is only partially true; in those years he actually had many guests, including the novelist Charles Lever, one of his college friends and in the mid-1860s he even went to London to meet his publisher Richard Bentley.

In 1861, he began the most productive period of his literary career. Le Fanu bought the Dublin University Magazine, in which he would publish most of his fiction, including his novels *The House by the Churchyard, Wylder's Hand* and *Uncle Silas*.

As Le Fanu aged, he kept on working hard. He used to write in bed until 2 a.m. and sleep in the morning. Despite his fast-paced writing rhythms, he was frequently ill and suffered from a heart condition. Moreover, he had frequent nightmares about an old house that was about to fall on him.[13] Such bad dreams, maybe influenced by the memory of Susanna's horrible visions, affected his literary production too. In the early works, the theme of the Great House featured only a few times, while in his late novels, old, decaying mansions appear almost obsessively.[14]

Joseph died in Dublin, on the 10th February 1873, at 59, because of his heart disease. He was buried in Mount Jerome cemetery and the house where he and his family lived

13 G.W. Crawford, *J. Sheridan Le Fanu. A Bio-Bibliography*, cit., pp. 7-9.
14 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.135.

still stands and a commemorative plaque is affixed on it.

His death was reported to have been dramatic and quite mysterious; he allegedly looked terrified in the doctor's eyes and said: “I feared this. The house fell at last”.[15]

1.2. Le Fanu's Works

During the nineteenth century, the ghost story became a distinct recognisable genre, which put together spooky sensational tales, psychological analysis and even philosophical reflections, which helped create disturbing and sophisticated tales. In the Victorian Age, the ghost story was more and more associated with contemporary settings. Le Fanu's fiction was widely inspired by eighteenth-century Gothic authors, like Horace Walpole, Charles Maturin[16] and Ann Radcliffe, but in his works the uncanny and the evil do not take place in ancient haunted castles, but in cosy, familiar domestic interiors, in modern seaside houses,[17] in evening omnibuses. This shows that the technological advances of the time were a meaningless defence against the terrifying and the incomprehensible.

In the late 1830s, two key works for the development of Victorian Ghost story were published: Charles Dickens' “The Story of the Goblins who Stole a Sexton”, which is a kind of prelude of *A Christmas Carol*, and “A Strange Event in the Life of Schalken the Painter” by Le Fanu. In this tale, the Irishman puts together facts and fiction, Gothic and prosaic, indeed the author mixes historical figures like the Dutch painter Gottfried Schalken with folkloristic and supernatural motives.[18]

According to many critics, Sheridan Le Fanu is undoubtedly “the best ghost story

15 G.W. Crawford, *J. Sheridan Le Fanu. A Bio-Bibliography*, cit., pp. 9,10.
16 M.H. Begnal, *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu,* Cranbury (NJ), Bucknell University Press, 1971, p.27.
17 P. Shaw, “Sheridan Le Fanu: Master of the Occult, the Uncanny and the Ominous”, in E.A. Lopez, I.C. Suarez, *Literatura Renacentista*, Oviedo, University of Oviedo, 2000, p.192.
18 N. Freeman, “The Victorian Ghost Story”, in A. Smith, W. Hughes, *The Victorian Gothic,* Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2012, pp.93,95,96.

writer the British Isles have ever produced". He was praised by important authors like Henry James, Algernon Swinburne, Elizabeth Bowen and Charles Dickens.[19] Moreover, Le Fanu was defined by V.S. Pritchett "the Simenon of the peculiar", stating that "he is an artist in surprise"[20]. Julian Symons in his *Bloody Murder* said that he is a very underrated author. He is "a writer of remarkable power in creating suspense, at his best a master of plot, and the creator of some of the most satisfying villains in Victorian literature".[21]

Reading his works is an intense experience, made of gliding bodies, ghostly protagonists, grotesque figures, but, at the same time, it is also a journey on the characters' disturbed minds and an analysis of the psychology of fear.[22]

Today, Le Fanu's novels and tales are world-wide recognised classics and his works represent the conjunction among Irish Studies, Gothic Studies, and the Victorian Sensation Novel.[23]

Like Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, much of Le Fanu's works swing between the detective fiction and the supernatural horror.[24] Indeed Le Fanu, along with the American author, pioneered the modern psychological thriller. Moreover, with the character of Dr. Martin Hesselius, the Irish writer created the figure of the metaphysician doctor and occult detective, from which derives Bram Stoker's occultist doctor Van Helsing, one of the main characters of *Dracula* (1897), Doyle's famous detective Sherlock Holmes, Algernon Blackwood's *John Silence* (1908), and William Hope Hodgson's *Carnaki the*

19 J. Rockhill, "Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu", in *The Green Book: Writings on Irish Gothic, Supernatural and Fantastic Literature, Samhain 2020, No.16,* Dublin, Swain River Press, p.27.

20 V.S. Prichett, *The Living Novel*, Arrow Books, London, 1960, p.104, quoted in P. Shaw, "Sheridan Le Fanu: Master of the Occult, the Uncanny and the Ominous", cit., p.190.

21 J. Symons, *Bloody Murder, From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel: a History*, Faber and Faber, London, 1927, pp.59-61, quoted in P. Shaw, "Sheridan Le Fanu: Master of the Occult, the Uncanny and the Ominous", cit., p.190.

22 A. Milkbank, "Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu: Gothic Grotesque and the Huguenot Inheritance", in J.M. Wright, *A Companion to Irish Literature Volume One,* Chichester, West Sussex, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, p.362.

23 J. Wolfreys, "Victorian Gothic", in *Teaching the Gothic*, ed. A. Powell, A. Smith, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p.73.

24 M.H. Begnal, *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, cit., p.28.

Ghost Finder (1913).[25] The character of Dr. Hesselius also strongly reminds to Dylan Dog, the occult investigator of Tiziano Sclavi's graphic novel, first published in 1986.

Le Fanu's works also inspired Arthur Conan Doyle's novel *The Firm of Girdlestone*, whose plot is based on *Uncle Silas* and the aforementioned *Dracula* was thought to be a sequel of Le Fanu's innovational story "Carmilla". In addition, in his "The Judge's House", Bram Stoker borrowed an episode from Le Fanu's "Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street".[26]

Le Fanu's earliest works are two Irish nationalist ballads, written in dialect, called "Shamus O'Brien" and "Phaudrig Croohore",[27] whereas his earliest tales are dated back to the 1830s. These tales were all gathered in the 1880 collection *The Purcell Papers*, featuring a priest who relates these stories. Le Fanu usually used these tales as a base for some of his most famous novels, or he further developed their plot in longer and more complex tales. For example, "The Drunkard's Dream" became "The Vision of Tom Chuff", and "The Fortunes of Sir Robert Ardagh" was expanded and its title changed into "Sir Dominick's Bargain". All of these early stories have a local Irish setting, except "Strange Event in the Life of Schalken the Painter", which takes place in Holland. Moreover, in the collection, there is also "The Ghost and the Bone-Setter", one of the author's most famous tales. In 1843, Le Fanu wrote two Italian tales named "Spalatro, from the Notes of Fra Giacomo", a 'miniature' Walpole-like Gothic novel.[28]

In 1851, Le Fanu published his first short story collection *Ghost Stories and Tales of Mystery*. In the collection's horror stories "The Watcher" and "Schalken the Painter", a shorter version of the 1839 tale, Le Fanu's usual ambiguity between real and unreal is not yet found, indeed the haunting ghosts are undoubtedly real and there is no rational explanation of the paranormal events that happen. This is because in these early works, he is not concerned with psychology and he does not want to convey a moral teaching,

25 N. Freeman, "The Victorian Ghost Story", cit., p.99.
26 P. Shaw, "Sheridan Le Fanu: Master of the Occult, the Uncanny and the Ominous", cit., p.189.
27 A. Milkbank, "Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu: Gothic Grotesque and the Huguenot Inheritance", cit., p.363.
28 J. Rockhill, "Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu", cit., pp.30,34,35.

but his aim is to stress on suspense, sensationalism and to point out his fascination with horror and brutality. The same thing happens in the other two tales of the collection “The Evil Guest” and “The Murdered Cousin”, which are detective thrillers. In these stories there is a great distance between the events and the reader, because everything is told in a calm and detached way, explaining the detective's deductions. At the same time, these stories are too mysterious and shocking, so the plots' artificiality is quite visible.

As his literary production develops, he seems to be more and more interested in the characters' psychology. The Gothic becomes 'internalised', i.e. the real supernatural threat is the characters' own disturbed mind and the evil is to be found only in the human consciousness. Such topic is very explicitly analysed in his famous collection of short stories *In a Glass Darkly.* In these tales of psychological horror, Dr. Hesselius, like a psychologist *avant la lettre,* witnesses the manifestation of the characters' unconscious, which emerges when their rational barriers are temporarily broken down. Their unconscious takes monstrous shapes, like in “Mr. Justice Harbottle” or in his most famous short story “Green Tea”.

In this tale Dr. Hesselius takes care of Mr. Jennings, a Reverend who finds himself incapable of performing his religious duties, because he is persecuted by a devilish monkey. Since only the Reverend can see it, the physician deduces that this is a hallucination, due to his excessive use of green tea and it is the projection of the patient's faith crisis. The monkey destroys his work, it says blasphemies and interrupts the Reverend's prayers. Eventually, Jennings cannot suffer its presence anymore and commits suicide.

Le Fanu's interest in psychology is evident in his novels too. These works, unlike his short stories, better express the author's *weltanschauung*. His novels are not merely thrillers and sensation fiction, they are mature and complex works, which attempt to analyse and explore both human psyche and the issues of contemporary society. Unlike his early works, his novels' strength is the characterisation of the many multifaceted

figures, who have to deal with complicated and life-threatening situations. However, these works are not narratives of education or *buildungsroman*; usually characters do not have a final purpose to achieve and they do not really learn something from their experiences (except for the case of *Uncle Silas*, which is analysed in chapter II). This is especially evident in the works he wrote after his wife's death. In these works, the protagonists are usually abandoned to their misfortunes, unable to understand the meaning of the events and their existence.

Le Fanu's first novel *The House by the Churchyard* came out in 1861 and deals with the theme of human evil, the most horrible and terrifying threat. This first novel, however, did not become as famous as *Wylder's Hand*. It was published in 1864, the same year of *Uncle Silas*, another well-known novel, which will be analysed in the following chapter.

In *Wylder's Hand*, Mark Wylder wants to marry Dorcas Brandon, to unite the two noble families and take control of her estates. However, they do not love each other and Mark has rather more interest in his former flame Rachel Hall, Dorcas' unmarried cousin. One night, after a fight with Stanley Lake, i.e. Dorcas' brother, Wylder mysteriously disappears. Eventually, it is discovered that Wylder was killed by Lake and Dorcas. In this novel, the human evil mind is once again the most terrible threat. However, the murderer is not a simple villain, he is a tormented figure, estranged from the ones he loves, so readers cannot help be sympathetic towards him.

In 1866, Le Fanu published *Guy Deverell*, and *All in the Dark*. The latter was not very successful, but is quite peculiar, because it mockingly deals with Spiritualism, which became fashionable in the 19th century. In 1867, *The Tenants of Malory* came out. This novel is important for the reintroduction of the character of Mr. Larkin, the scheming lawyer of *Wylder's Hand*, and for the creation of Mr. Dingwell, a very particular Dickensian figure. In the same year, he published *A Lost Name*, in which he deals with the problem of the evil human soul once again.

His 1868 novel *Haunted Lives* is the first of his most nihilistic and pessimistic works, where the world is seen as evil and treacherous and everything is shrouded in shadow and disguise. As his novels progress, it is possible to see a steady movement from an optimistic predisposition and religious faith to a fatalistic nihilism. Beyond *The Wyvern Mystery* (1869), such attitude characterises his later works, the 1871 *Checkmate*, *The Rose and the Key*, and it culminates in his last novel *Willing to Die*, published posthumously in 1873. In these almost pre-Existentialist last works, Le Fanu stresses the absurdity and the meaninglessness of the world and existence, which is utterly incomprehensible.[29]

In Le Fanu's vast literary production, there are some recurrent themes. One of his works' main topics is surely human mind's limits and the exploration of the unknown. This can be found in "The Ghost and the Bonesetter", which is inspired by E.T.A. Hoffman's famous tale "The Sandman" and it inaugurates the topic of the relation between natural and supernatural, which characterises much of Le Fanu's fiction, especially his novel *Uncle Silas* and the stories of *In a Glass Darkly.* In these works, many Swedenborgian characters either want to study and reach a metaphysical dimension, like Dr. Bryerly or Reverend Jennings, or they actually communicate with spirits. This is the case of Captain Barton, the protagonist of "The Familiar", one of the tales of *In a Glass Darkly*. He is haunted by the ghost of an avenging man, with whom he communicates by letters. Moreover, such attitude is mocked in *All in the Dark*, where he denounces the exploitation of the occult investigation and the over-materialisation of death.[30]

So, in many of Le Fanu's works, the tangible world and the spiritual dimension are mixed together. Therefore, the presence of many revenants is not surprising. Some figures are supernatural creatures, like the vampire Carmilla, the evil ghost of *The*

29 M.H. Begnal, *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, cit., pp.28-31,35,36-39,46,47,49,51-53,60,64,65,66,68,69,71,75,78.

30 A. Milkbank, "Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu: Gothic Grotesque and the Huguenot Inheritance", cit., pp. 364-366,375.

Haunted Baronet and the stone-faced man in “Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street”. Others are perfectly ordinary figures, who mingle among the livings, like Justice Harbottle's revenant, who looks and behaves like a living man and in “Sir Dominick's Bargain”, the Devil takes the shape of a French recruiting-officer. The return from the afterlife is many times associated to the theme of guilt in Le Fanu's works. In some stories, these threatening figures come back to take their revenge against guilty haunted protagonists. This happens in “The Familiar”, where an avenging spirit haunts Captain Barton, who wronged him in the past and in “Mr. Justice Harbottle”, where the main character is persecuted by the spirit of a man he unjustly sentenced to death. This haunting eventually leads the protagonist to commit suicide. In other tales, the revenants themselves did something wrong in their lives, so they are unable to rest. This is the case of “Squire Toby's Will”. When he was alive, the old squire Toby ill-treated his son. One day, he comes back to life and haunts his child, because he wants to apologise. Something similar happens in “Madame Crowl's Ghost”, where the phantom of an old woman is seen opening the door of a mysterious room. It is found out that the skeleton of the widower's disappeared son is hidden there and the ghost is trying to attract the attention to her undiscovered guilt.[31]

As said before, a pessimistic and nihilistic attitude is visible in Le Fanu's later works. However, such tendency can be seen already in his early stories, collected in *The Purcell Papers*. Their general tone is very melancholic and they show a “shrunken capacity for life”: there are religious unease, despair and suicides.[32]

In his late 1860s fiction such topics are almost an obsession for him. These extremely modern works are the portrayal of the nineteenth-century fall of all 'ontological certainties'. The characters are extremely tormented, they live deep existential and psychic crisis given by the loss of philosophical and social convictions. The familiar

31 P. Shaw, “Sheridan Le Fanu: Master of the Occult, the Uncanny and the Ominous”, cit., pp. 198,200-202.

32 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.61.

world and value system, which was thought to be stable and unquestionable, falls apart, therefore there is no safe place and even one's own home becomes alien and haunted.

The credibility of the established religion is the first thing that is questioned.[33] Indeed many characters do not believe in it anymore: they are Swedenborgians or atheists, like Jekyl Marlowe in *Guy Deverell*, who is an epicurean and Mark Shadwell, in *A Lost Name*, who declares himself a rationalist.[34] Moreover, in many cases the hauntings emerge from the void left by the spiritual authority.

Like Jude Fawley in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, or later on, Gustav von Aschenbach in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, Le Fanu's characters fight against their sense of vacancy, against an "urge towards nihilism"[35] from which they cannot escape and which leads them to death. This is why suicide and self-destruction are two recurrent themes in Le Fanu's late fiction. The *In a Glass Darkly* collection provides many examples of this. In "Green Tea", Jennings drinks so much tea that he starts hallucinating and he eventually cannot stop his 'run' towards nihilism and cuts his throat with a razor. In "Carmilla", where Le Fanu comments on the self-destructive aspect of a total submission to pleasure and sexuality, the young Laura starts a dangerous relationship with the vampire, jeopardising in this way her life.[36] Moreover, in "The Familiar", Barton falls in a deep melancholic state and decides to end his life.

Suicide and self-destruction characterise some of Le Fanu's novels too; in *Uncle Silas*, Maud's uncle destructs himself taking huge quantities of opium and laudanum and he eventually commits suicide, while in *Willing to Die*, one of Le Fanu's most gloomy and thought-provoking works, Francis Ware takes his own life in front of an open Bible.

Le Fanu's works are not only characterised by a great variety of themes and by peculiar characters, but also by an interesting style of writing. He wrote his fiction under a series of editorial pressures, which imposed him to follow certain rules. He had

33 J. Wolfreys, "Victorian Gothic", cit., pp.62,63,67,72.
34 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.189.
35 J. Walton, *Vision and Vacancy. The Fictions of J.S. Le Fanu,* Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2007, pp.3,10.
36 M.H. Begnal, *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, cit., p.44.

to use an English setting, because the English readership did not want to know about Irish questions, that is why none of his novels are set in contemporary Ireland. In addition, he could not even refer explicitly to industrial production, agricultural labour and, more in general, economic activity, so because of all these restrictions, he does not create a unified, distinguishable landscape. His novels are set neither in England nor in Ireland; even if they take place in England, the landscape he describes is more similar to Le Fanu's native Country. Moreover, the boundary and the difference between urban and rural landscapes is usually blurred. Such displacement also represents his rejection against the idea of a single identity and social stability.[37] So, Le Fanu's literary production has a hybrid, ambiguous, 'hyphened' nature, which of course mirrors his Anglo-Irish origin. His works are so ambiguous and full of symbolism that Victorian reviewers did not know how to interpret them. Le Fanu's works often have superimposing narrators, intertextual allusions and deceiving first-hand witnesses, whom the author often mocks and parodies. Moreover, his stories are a blend of comedy, violence, Gothic, fantasy, detective story, and realism.[38] Their hybridity is also enhanced by his use of grotesque.

Grotesqueness is indeed hybridity *per se*, it is an uncanny element which amazes, entertains and disgusts at the same time. In “The Ghost and the Bonesetter”, the grotesque is the 'energy' of the tale. The story deals with a professional bone-setter, who at a Great House, sees an old squire. This figure literary climbs out of his portrait frame and demands him assistance for his injured leg. At a certain point, his limb strips off from his body and falls down. The dismembered body and the severed leg are the grotesque elements, because such image is comic, but it is also uncanny, since it disturbs “our sense of the integrity of the body”. Moreover, this story is destabilising because the opposition between materiality and spirituality is crossed, since the immaterial spirit has a physical limb.

37 W. J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen,* Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1993, pp.104,146,161.

38 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness,* London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp.2,3,203.

Le Fanu's most celebrated historical novels, *The Cock and the Anchor*, and *Torlogh O'Brien*, have a grotesque character too. However, in this case, realistic and brutal descriptions of tortures and forcible distension of limbs make these novels more horrible than comic, while in *The House by the Churchyard* the grotesque is conveyed by a combination of social comedy, in the manner of Brinsley Sheridan with Gothic murders.[39]

In Le Fanu's works there is neither difference between the material and the spiritual dimensions, nor between life and death or reality and fiction. There are many 'still-life-characters'; they have skeletal and cadaverous features, are portrayed as unnaturally pale and often appear all of a sudden, as ghostly visions. So, they do not seem living people, but rather undead creatures. The lack of realism of these figures is also enhanced by the *trompe l'oeil* settings in which they appear, which is used to stress on the fact that "the things which *seem* real are not". This technique is used in "Carmilla" and in "Madam Crowl's Ghost", where a curtained bed surrounds the characters, in *Haunted Lives* and in "An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street", a window frame fulfils this task and at the beginning of *Uncle Silas*, the pale and mysterious Austin Ruthyn is 'framed' by an open cabinet.[40]

Beyond the *trompe l'oeil* settings, there are other pictorial similes and they are used once again to convey an idea of fictionality. An example of this is the twenty-second chapter of *Uncle Silas*, when Maud and Mary Quince hear a noise at night and they find out that Dr. Bryerly is watching Austin's dead body. Maud fixes the Swedenborgian doctor using the window as if it were a camera lens, while at the end of the chapter, the description of the silhouettes and the shadows on the wall, made by the candle light, remind of a paint. Moreover, Le Fanu uses many words associated with painting, like 'perspective', 'shadow', 'dusky light':[41]

39 A. Milkbank, "Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu: Gothic Grotesque and the Huguenot Inheritance", cit., pp.363,364.

40 J. Walton, *Vision and Vacancy. The Fictions of J.S. Le Fanu*, cit., p.25.

41 W. J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, cit., pp. 108,109.

> It ended by our peeping out [...] upon the gallery. Through each window in the perspective came its blue sheet of moonshine; but the door on which our attention was fixed was in shade, and we thought we could discern the glare of a candle through the keyhole. […] The door opened, the dusky light of a candle emerged, the shadow of a figure crossed within it, and in another moment the mysterious Doctor Bryerly – angular, ungainly, in the black cloth coat that fitted little better than a coffin – issued from the chamber, candle in hand. […] [he] stepped cautiously upon the gallery floor, shutting and locking the door upon the dead; and then having listened for a second, the saturnine figure, casting a gigantic and distorted shadow upon the ceiling and side-wall from the lowered candle, strode lightly down the long passage, away from us.[42]

At the very beginning of the aforementioned novel, there is a clear reference to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood style. Maud and doctor Bryerly are walking in the graveyard to visit the heroine's mother's grave. The description of the landscape around them, stressed on its vivid and bright colours, recalls one of William Morris or Dante Gabriel Rossetti's paintings:[43]

> He led me into the garden – the Dutch garden, we used to call it – with a balustrade, and statues at the farther front. […] There are tall trees throwing soft shadows […] and flowering shrubs, I can't say what, only the colours are beautiful, growing by the walls and windows. […] We turned to the left, and there we stood in rich sunlight, among the many objects he had described. (21)

In addition, this sense of fictionality is also conveyed by the novel's 'Rembrandt-like' characters. Human figures are depicted as very static and rigid; this reduces their spontaneity and lifelikeness and it highlights their artificiality.[44]

An interesting characteristic of Le Fanu's writing style is his peculiar use of names. In his fiction, a name is never used only once, indeed the author seems to be 'attached' to certain names. In “The Haunted Baronet”, a Philip Feltram disappears into a lake, while

42 J.S. Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas,* London, Penguin Classics, 2000, p.131. Henceforth all quotations in the text are from this edition and will be given in parenthesis.

43 W. J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, cit., p.116.

44 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.151.

in *Uncle Silas* Feltram is the name of a town near the Ruthyn household. In the same novel, Scarsdale is a church where Madame de la Rougierre brings the heroine, but it is also the name of a character of *Loved and Lost*. The name 'Scarsdale' is also a kind of link between these two novels; in *Uncle Silas* Maud meets her cousin Dudley for the first time at Church Scarsdale and in *Loved and Lost* the narrator meets a cousin named Scarsdale. Moreover, the author also uses anagrams, like in the case of Carmilla/Millarca/Mircalla.

This name-interchange is frequent in Le Fanu, but it almost never happens with women's names; apart from the repetition of the names Maud (Maud Ruthyn and Maud Vernon) and Eugenie (Eugenie de Barras and Eugenie Countess d'Aulnois), the other female characters have their own name and this makes them more recognisable and less forgettable.

The main problem with name-shifting is indeed the loss of a definable personality. Names are usually considered the expression of one's own inviolable identity, but if a name refers to many different things, it loses its 'uniqueness' and the reassuring confidence on the identity distinctiveness is threatened.

Like the author himself, who bears the name Sheridan, many of his characters have recognisable names, which are associated to previous literary, political or religious figures. In "The Haunted Baronet", Philip Feltram's antagonist is Sir Bale Mardykes, a clear reference to John Bale, a Protestant bishop of Ossory and author of many plays. In *Willing to Die* the name of Francis Ware is an allusion to Sir James Ware, who pioneered the Irish historiography. Moreover, a string of English dramatists' names can be found: Marlowe, Marston, Sedley, Shirley, Wycherley and others.

Not only names recur in Le Fanu's works. There are also many elements of the plots that repeat themselves. For example, in *Uncle Silas*, Madame de la Rougierre says she saw a ghost "shape like a monkey, sitting in the corner, with his arms round his knees". (35) The description of this ghost clearly reminds to Jennings' hallucination.[45] In the

45 V. Sage, "Notes", in J.S. Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas*, London, Penguin Classics, 2000, cit., p.449.

same novel, Charke is said to have killed himself, by cutting his throat with a razor. Eventually, it is found out that Silas murdered him. However, in “Green Tea”, the throat-cutting really happens, indeed Jennings commits suicide in this way. In “The Room in the Dragon Volant”, Jennings' death is somehow foreshadowed; in the tale, Beckett's servant pointlessly departs to get some razors. Moreover, the masked ball of this short story is re-enacted in “Carmilla”.[46]

46 W. J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, cit., pp. 77-80,82,83,169.

Chapter II: Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*

2.1. The Origin of *Uncle Silas* and its Editorial History

Uncle Silas is Le Fanu's fifth novel, which was serialised for the first time in the *Dublin University Magazine* between July and December 1864.[47] It was initially entitled "Maud Ruthyn"[48], i.e. the name of the novel's young heroine and narrator, the two following episodes were published with the title "Maud Ruthyn and Uncle Silas", while the last three instalments came out as "Uncle Silas and Maud Ruthyn" to make readers focus their attention on the male character. Late in 1864, the novel was published in three volumes by Le Fanu's London editor Richard Bentley under the definitive title of *Uncle Silas: A Tale of Bartram-Haugh*,[49] which is the name of the mansion where Maud and her uncle live. The novel was an immediate success and it never went out of print; in 1871 Bentley already published a fourth edition. New editions were printed in 1904 and 1913, while in 1926 the novel became part of the World's Classics and in this period Le Fanu achieved a great fame and his short stories became a model for M.R. James' horror stories. In 1931 a theatrical adaptation of the novel was made and, after a short period in which the novel's popularity decreased, in the 1940s many new editions were printed. After the Second World War many critics,

47 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*" in J.S. Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas*, London, Penguin Classics, 2000, cit., p.ix.
48 A. Gaylin, "Ghostly Dispossessions: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*", in A. Hepburn, *Trouble Legacies: Narrative and Inheritance,* Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2007, p.96.
49 *Ibid.*

like the novelist Elizabeth Bowen, focused on the Irish traditions and on the Anglo-Irish aspects of the novel. In 1947 the company Gainsborough made a film out of the novel and in 1991 the BBC adapted it for the television, broadcasting a TV show called *The Dark Angel*.[50]

This novel might have been inspired by an incident happened in 1743, when Frances Ingolsby, a Limerick heiress was kidnapped by Hugh Fitzjohn Massy, the younger son of a rival family,[51] but *Uncle Silas* is generally considered the development of a short story called "A Passage in the Secret History of an Irish Countess", that Le Fanu published anonymously in November 1838 in Ireland. This story was part of the "Purcell Papers", i.e. a collection of short stories owned by a fictitious antiquarian; a Catholic priest Father Francis Purcell. This short story is based on the two key elements of *Uncle Silas*' plot: a young heroine whose life is endangered by her father and the topic of the 'Locked Room Mystery', which was first used by Edgar Allan Poe in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue".

The other basis for *Uncle Silas* was "The Murdered Cousin", an expansion of "A Passage". It is a tale full of horror that is however explained by the plots of the evil uncle, from which the young heroine manages to escape, but her cousin is murdered in her place;[52] an ending that strongly resembles *Uncle Silas*' finale. The characters of these stories are very similar too; in the short story, the heroine's father resembles Austin: he gives her a very strict religious education, he is a very secluded man and he is "what is called an oddity",[53] the same term used in *Uncle Silas* to describe Maud's father: "But my father was an oddity" (10), while the protagonist's uncle Sir Arthur Tyrell is very similar to Maud's uncle: he tries to kill his niece to steal her inheritance too and, like Silas, who is an opium-addict, he suffers from gambling addiction.

50 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., pp. xiii-xv.
51 A. Gaylin, "Ghostly Dispossessions: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*" cit., p.96.
52 M.H. Begnal, *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, cit., p.30.
53 J.S. Le Fanu, "The Murdered Cousin", in *The Literature Network*, [accessed 04.02.2021], http://www.online-literature.com/lefanu/3194/ .

However, differently from “A Passage” and “The Murdered Cousin”, *Uncle Silas* is not set in Ireland, but in the UK, in the Derbyshire countryside, a setting Le Fanu already chose for his novel *Wylder's Hand*. This choice was surely influenced by Bentley,[54] who would not publish novels set in Ireland. However, being an Anglo-Irish author, the choice of an English setting acquired in Le Fanu's novel a political meaning. In the UK, Ireland was considered a barbaric place, where young heiresses were abducted and forced to marry their kidnapper.[55] In *Uncle Silas* Le Fanu deconstructed this stereotype by making the young Maud a victim of the English uncle's ruthless cruelty and greed, underlining in this way the fact that malevolence is not an Irish characteristic but is to be found anywhere. Derbyshire was also a very important place for the author's personal life, indeed here he spent his honeymoon with his beloved and ill wife Susanna. *Uncle Silas* is one of the nine novels that he wrote frantically in the first nine years after the death of his wife.[56] His psychological sufferance and the secluded lifestyle he lead after this tragedy are somehow mirrored in Maud's sorrowful and isolated life and in the claustrophobic, dark and maze-like mansions where the novel takes place.

As Victor Sage points out, *Uncle Silas* is considered a classic Victorian frightener and at the time of its publication, it was generally perceived as a sensation fiction, a novel that “appeals to the 'nerves'”, i.e. what in modern times can be called a psychological thriller. However, Le Fanu always distanced his work from this definition, because his real aim was writing a kind of contemporary *Waverley*. He invoked Sir Walter Scott and the romance Romantic tradition as his main source and invented the genre of “tragic English romance” to define his novels. In Le Fanu's time, Scott's fiction was considered a form of contemporary realism, a genre that differs completely from *Uncle Silas*,[57] as the *Saturday Review* pointed out. The magazine stated that, unlike Scott, Le Fanu's

54 V. Sage, “Introduction to *Uncle Silas”*, cit., pp. x,xi.
55 A. Gaylin, “Ghostly Dispossessions: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*”, cit., p.96.
56 V. Sage, “Introduction to *Uncle Silas*”, cit., pp.x,xi.
57 *Ibid*. pp. xi-xiv.

novels did not use quiet, pastel tints, but "he is always darkening the stage and turning the lime light. [...] All the characters appear more or less weird or unearthly [...] The English countryside becomes a veritable *Castle of Otranto*. […] Mr. Le Fanu has much more in common with Mrs. Radcliffe than with Sir Walter Scott".[58] The label of a sensationalist writer stuck and, whether he liked it or not, he became a well-known master of Gothic fiction. Indeed at the end of the century, Henry James stated that Le Fanu's works were an ideal reading for the hours after midnight and he probably had *Uncle Silas* in mind.[59]

2.2. *Uncle Silas*' Literary Genres

On the one hand Le Fanu was right when he stated that his novel was not just a mere frightener, indeed *Uncle Silas* deals with many important topics, such as the question of homeland, identity, exile and inheritance[60] but, on the other hand, it is impossible to deny that the novel has several sensationalist features, like the retrospective plot based on three different temporal levels: 1864, the date of publication, when the adult Maud narrates the story of her youth, 1842-1845, when the main story takes place, 1790-1815, Silas' youth. Moreover, the novel's sensationalism is underlined by the haunting past that threatens the present, a mysterious death[61] and the great presence of Gothic motives, settings and characters, which can be found already in the very first lines, where Maud describes the atmosphere that surrounds Knowl and her father Austin, who resembles a ghost:

> It was winter [...] and great gusts were rattling at the windows, and wailing and thundering among our tall trees and ivied chimneys – a very dark night, and a very cheerful fire blazing […] in a genuine old fireplace, in a sombre

58 *Saturday Review,* 4th February 1865, p.146, quoted in V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.xii.
59 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.xiii.
60 A. Gaylin, "Ghostly Dispossessions: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*", cit., p. 88.
61 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.xxiii.

> old room.
> He [Austin] was now walking up and down this spacious old room, which extending round an angle at the far end, was very dark in the quarter. It was his wont to walk up and down, thus, without speaking […] At the far end he nearly disappeared in gloom, and then returning emerged for a few minutes, like a portrait with a background of shadow, and then again in silence faded nearly out of view. This monotony and silence would have been terrifying to a person less accustomed to it then I. (9,10)

Another striking example is found later in the novel, when Maud is looking for Mr Charke's skeleton and she finds out that Madame de la Rougierre is living in Bartram-Haugh. Once again, like in Austin's case, Madame's description makes her look like a ghost haunting the mansion's attic:

> I did not find myself in a strangely furnished suite of apartments, but at the entrance of a gallery […] it was very imperfect lighted, and ended in total darkness. […] I looked down the long space before me, losing itself among ambiguous shadows, lulled in sinister silence. […] I opened a side door, and entered a large room, where were in a corner, some rusty and cobwebbed bird cages, but nothing more. […] The door through which I entered made a little accidental creak, and with my heart at my lips, I gazed at it, expecting to see Charke, or the skeleton […] one room more [...] to it I glided, shoved it open, advancing one step, and the great bony figure of Madame de la Rougierre was before me. […] She looked a thought more withered. […] With a sense of incredulity and terror I gazed, freezing, at this evil phantom, who returned my stare for a few seconds with a shrinking scowl, dismal and grim, as of an evil spirit detected. (367,368)

Uncle Silas does not distance from typical Gothic fiction; spectres, unexplainable apparitions and possessions are strongly present in the novel. As Maud reminds the reader, every old English house is haunted, indeed spirits seem to live both in Batram-Haugh and in Knowl, and these ghosts have proper nouns: Linkman, a tall slender man carrying a torch and Lady Rachel, whose sad sighs can be heard at night in Knowl's corridors. But, surprisingly, these spectres do not haunt the young heroine, in fact she

does not even seem scared of them.[62] Such feature makes *Uncle Silas* an unconventional Gothic novel. The real threat are not ancient spectres that come from the past, but living human presences haunting Maud's waking hours, which, not by chance, the heroine portrays as ghosts, like in the aforementioned cases of Austin Ruthyn and Madame de la Rougierre's descriptions. Terry Castle called it "the spectralization of the other": a loved one is perceived as a haunting ghost even if he or she is alive because they are dead to the perceiver.[63] In the novel Maud Ruthyn stands in awe for some authoritative figures, e.g. her father, her wicked governess and later on her uncle Silas Ruthyn. These characters are supposed to support and guide her but they actually neglect and harm Maud. Like ghosts, these figures appear all of a sudden in her life with mysterious demands, ambiguous allusions and threats. Those who scare her are perceived as ghosts, to make these menaces less concrete and scaring in her mind. The overwhelming fear these spectres provoke is paralysing and takes over one's mind and body, so that the possessed turns into a spectre too.[64] Fear has the power to "spectralize" Maud. When she is scared, the heroine describes herself as "deadly pale" (321) or as a "phantom newly risen from the grave" (429). When Maud sees Lady Monica's carriage leaving Bartram-Haugh, realising horrified that her last chance to escape from her terrible uncle is gone, she loses her vitality, as if both her body and mind were fading away. She seems to lose her ability to act: she cannot get up from her bed, in fact she asks Mary Quince to look for Madame de la Rougierre and she states that she "felt something of the despair of a lost spirit" (398). Moreover, towards the end of the novel, Maud is clearly perceived as already dead: when she is imprisoned in Bartram-Haugh, she looks down at what is meant to be her own grave.[65]

62 A. Gaylin, "Ghostly Dispossessions: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*", cit., p. 94.
63 T. Castle, "The Spectralization of the Other in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*", in *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature*, New York, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown, 1987, p.234, quoted in A. Gaylin, "Ghostly Dispossession: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.94.
64 A. Gaylin, "Ghostly Dispossessions: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*", cit., pp.94,95,98,99.
65 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.118.

Possession in *Uncle Silas* has actually a symbolic function; according to Katherine Rowe, ghostly possession is a condition that occurs when a person cannot recognise or ratify his/her identity, rights and property.[66] This is exactly what happens to Maud, whose property and identity are constantly threatened by Silas and the other spectral characters. Therefore her persecution and ghostly appearance symbolise the change of her status from owner to possessed, creating in this way an ambiguity between spectral possession and the attempted dispossession of both her property and her body, challenging therefore the reassuring John Locke's statement, according to which a person's body is an inalienable property.[67] Maud's body indeed is many times used and exploited by others: Austin 'uses' her as a means to prove society that Silas has become a good man, Maud is kidnapped and entrapped by her governess and Silas. And, towards the end of the novel, her evil cousin Dudley tries to rape her. Only after having defeated these living spirits, she manages to regain full possession of her life, body and property, as it is shown at the end of the novel. Writing down her story makes her totally aware of her life and she manages to see what happened during her youth from an external point of view, indeed she even dismisses her story as childish and hysterical.[68] In her youth, she was naïve and could not fully understand and control what happened to her, while the adult Maud seems much more perceptive. However, the end of the novel is not reassuring. It seems that the haunting ghosts are not totally defeated. Maud and Ilbury get married, but like the latter's name suggests (Il-bury), the haunting threats of the past are not really put to rest; the novel does not tell where the young couple lives, they may still be living in Bartram-Haugh, so still in connection with the horrible events of the past. Moreover, the ghostly governess' body is exhumed to prove the murderer's guilt and Dudley disappears after Madame de la Rougierre's killing but then he is spotted by

66 K. Rowe, *Dead Hands: Fictions of Agency, Renaissance to Modern*. Stanford, Stanford UP, 1999, p.12, quoted in A. Gaylin, "Ghostly Dispossessions: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*", cit., p. 90.

67 A. Gaylin, "Ghostly Dispossessions: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*", cit., p. 90.
68 *Ibid*., p.101.

Tom Brice in Australia.[69]

It can be safely said that this novel is mainly a Gothic story, however there are many references to other literary genres, like the folk tale, more precisely “Little Red Riding Hood”, “Hansel and Gretel”, “The Old Woman in the Wood”, “Beauty and the Beast” and also to certain archetypical characters of fairy tales, like the wicked step-mother, the witch (both impersonated by Madame de la Rougierre) and the bogey-man (represented by Silas). The folk tale from which the novel was mainly inspired is “Bluebeard”. Indeed the plot of the novel recalls the tale's storyline. Maud resembles Bluebeard's wife: she is entrapped in this maze-like mansion, she is forbidden to open a secret room while her father is away[70] and, before leaving, Austin gives her a bunch of keys and asks her to keep one of them hidden under her pillow.

However, not only Austin is associated with Bluebeard. Later in the novel, Maud's cousin Monica describes Silas as if he was Bluebeard, saying that Silas is “a mysterious old man” and she “can fancy him an old enchanter in his castle”(156), while Maud tells that Bartram-Haugh has “a range of rooms along the one side of the great gallery, with closed window-shutters, and the doors generally locked” (223).

As these examples show, the figure of Bluebeard is represented in the novel by the two brothers Austin and Silas who entrap Maud and conspire against her,[71] as if she were Bluebeard's wife. Indeed, the heroine explicitly calls herself “Mrs. Bluebeard” and draws a parallel between her story and the fairy tale: “I shut the book, as Mrs. Bluebeard might the door of the chamber of horrors at the sound of her husband's step, and skipped to a remote part of the room” (284). Maud is also aware of the moral of “Bluebeard”, according to which women are irresistibly curious[72] and this excessive curiosity is dangerous because it may lead to the discovery of something terrible. Despite her husband's forbiddance, Bluebeard's wife opens the secret locked room, endangering in

69 *Ibid*.
70 V. Sage, “Introduction to *Uncle Silas*”, cit., pp. xv-xviii.
71 *Ibid*. p.xvii.
72 *Ibid.* p. xvi.

this way her life: her husband, whom she finds out to be a serial killer, wants to murder her because she disobeyed him. In the novel, Maud projects this characteristic on herself when she wonders why "curiosity […] is so specially hard to resist" and why "something forbidden" stimulates the "contumacious appetite" (19). Moreover, also in Maud's case her curiosity many times leads her to horrible discoveries and dangerous situations.

Uncle Silas has also many references to comedy, which are intermingled with its Gothic and violent events, conveying the novel an eclectic tone. There are many allusions to the eighteenth century comedies, like the works of Oliver Goldsmith, whose *She Stoops to Conquer* is cited by Maud,[73] George Colman the Younger and Richard Brinsley Sheridan, who was Le Fanu's great-uncle and was well-known for his comedy *A School for Scandal*. Sheridan's influence is fundamental in the novel. The opposition between the two brothers Charles and Joseph Surface was Le Fanu's inspiration for the darker and gloomier relationship between the Ruthyn brothers: Joseph is virtuous and economically stable, therefore he resembles Austin, while Charles, who is dissolute and addicted to gambling is very similar to Silas.[74] Moreover, Silas directly refers to Sheridan calling himself "poor Sheridan" (326) and the episode of Maud's coach-detour on the road to Dover is a reference to a comic incident happened to the comedian himself, an incident that Le Fanu mentioned also in his novel *The Rose and the Key.* Despite all these references to the eighteenth-century comedy, in the novel the traditional comic style is intermingled with a dark and threatening context, so comedy becomes grotesque. A famous example of grotesque is Madame de la Rougierre's '*danse macabre*' performed in front of a terrified Maud at the Church Scarsdale's cemetery,[75] an uncanny and disturbing performance, that amuses and scares readers at the same time, also because in this passage Madame's ghostly and demonic nature is particularly

73 *Ibid*. p.xxxiii.
74 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.128.
75 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., pp.xix,xx,xxxiii.

stressed. Her bald head may remind of a skull, her terrible laugh of an evil creature and she calls Maud “leetle mortal”, which may suggest that, unlike the heroine, she is immortal and undead.

> 'I am Madame la Morgue – Mrs Deadhouse! I will present you my friends, Monsieur Cadavre and Monsieur Squelette. Come come, leetle mortal, let us play. Ouaah!' And she uttered a horrid yell from her enormous mouth, and pushing her wig and bonnet back, so as to show her great, bald head. She was laughing, and really looked quite mad. (41,42).

Another example of grotesque is represented by the fight between the good-mannered Captain Oakley and the rustic Dudley Ruthyn. The episode is described with a cruel realism, also emphasised by the insensitive behaviour of Dickon Hawkes, who does not want to intervene because he enjoys the show. However, this scene focuses also on the comic contrast of registers used by the two characters, which reflect the difference of their manners; even if Oakley is beaten down heavily by Dudley, while Hawkes tunes his grotesque roarings,[76] the Captain comically never loses his good manners and demeanour.

This contrast of manners and of language registers is a *leit motiv* of the novel, which conveys a comic effect. Dialects, slang, Madame de la Rougierre's broken English and her mixture of English and French words contrast with a standard English. An example of this is Milly Ruthyn's funny dialect[77] and rustic manners that disconcert Maud:

> 'Hallo, cousin' she cried, giving my dress a smack with her open hand. 'What a plague do you want of all that bustle: you'll leave it behind, lass, the first blush you jump over'. I was a good deal astounded. I was also very near laughing, for there was […] an indescribable grotesqueness in the fashion of her garments, which heightened the outlandishness of her talk. (197).

76 *Ibid*. p. xxxiii.
77 *Ibid,* p.xx.

2.3. Writing Style

One of the novel's most peculiar feature is its ambiguity, which is conveyed by its layered structure and its multiple readings. As pointed out before, the novel is told in retrospective and it deals with three different temporal dimensions. This gives readers a three-fold sense of time, which provides the text with parallel frame narrations,[78] conveyed by the novel's subplots. Beside Maud's main storyline, other stories are told, e.g. Silas' youth, his portrait's realisation, Mr. Charke and his mysterious suicide that took place in Silas' mansion, Milly Ruthyn's past and the lives of Bartram-Haugh's employees. Despite Maud's detailed description of the characters, almost all of them seem shady and ambiguous, as if they could not be fully trusted. While Milly, Monica and Mary Quince seem to be the only straightforwardly positive characters of the novel, the others always behave in an ambivalent way towards Maud. Indeed their behaviour suggests at the same time their will to harm and yet to protect the young heroine.

If the characters are ambiguous, the same thing can be said about the events that occur, which are scrupulously described. However, many elements of the plot are deliberately unclear: readers can never fully understand what is really going on, indeed the events told in the novel usually seem to have both a supernatural and a prosaic explanation. This is a technique, which was already used by Radcliffe and Maturin, to reflect about the connection between faith and scepticism,[79] rationality and irrationality. But the novel's ambiguity, which is grounded on its Gothic elements and on the alleged action of preternatural forces, does not really lie on the events or characters, but it is conveyed by the narration, which is always switching between wide and restricted viewpoints. This technique should explain events, instead it conveys them ambiguity and multiple perspectives,[80] because everything is filtered through the young heroine's point of view.

78 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.3.
79 *Ibid*. p.113.
80 *Ibid*. p.104.

Unlike Le Fanu's previous third-person novels, in *Uncle Silas* the protagonist Maud narrates the story from her point of view, a limited "keyhole" subjective narration, split between her teenage testimony and her grown-up retrospective. This division creates an ever-present gap between what is perceived by the girl and what is known by the adult. Witnessing is a fundamental narrative strategy, it has a great influence on the story's perception, because since she witnesses what she tales, readers are apt to believe her. However, she cannot be trusted. Inheriting Ann Radcliffe's insistence on the narrator's ignorance and isolation,[81] Maud is described as an *ingénue*, who lives an isolated life, is neglected by her father and is poorly educated by the house maids. Her inadequate education has made her a fearful and orthodox girl, who is not able to understand what really happens to her because she sees everything through the filter of her fear and superstition,[82] which makes her see many rationally explainable events as the actions of preternatural forces. Even if the occurrence of actual supernatural events cannot be denied (see e.g. Knowl's hauntings or the prediction of Madame de la Rougierre's return), it can be argued that much of the novel's Gothic elements come from Maud's distorted perception of the events.[83] An example of this is to be found in the very first chapter of the novel:

> I suppose they [Austin and Bryerly] were too intent on other matters to hear, but receiving no answer, I entered the room. My father was sitting in his chair, with his coat and waistcoat off, Mr. Bryerly kneeling on a stool beside him, rather facing him […] There was a large tome of their divinity lore, I suppose, open on the table close by. The lank black figure of Mr Bryerly stood up, and he concealed something quickly in the breast of his coat. My father stood up also, looking paler, I think, than I ever saw him till then, and he pointed grimly to the door, and said, 'Go'. Mr. Bryerly pushed me gently back with his hands to my shoulders, and smiled down from his dark features with an expression quite unintelligible to me. […] The last thing I saw at the door was the tall, slim figure in black, and the dark,

81 *Ibid*. pp. 102,113,114.
82 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.xxi.
83 *Ibid*.

> significant smile following me: and then the door was shut and locked, and the two Swedenborgians were left to their mysteries. (12).

This narration suggests that the two men are caught doing some kind of mysterious practices, as the opened divinity book suggests, a kind of séance lead by Bryerly, who Maud thinks to be a disciple of an occult religion and whose "slim figure in black" and "significant smile" suggest that he is a dark, ambiguous and untrustworthy man. However, Maud misjudges him and the whole situation. The old housekeeper Mrs. Rusk, repeating the Rector's words,[84] says that Bryerly is "a great conjurer among the Swedenborg sect"(11), so Maud's superstitious mind thinks that the men are indulging in heretical, occult practices. Actually, the girl does not really know him: she calls him "Mr", but in fact he is Austin's doctor, who is taking his pulse with his stop watch, that is what he mysteriously conceived in his pocket. He has just diagnosed an aneurism, which will be fatal to Austin. Indeed the "divinity lore" is probably a medical book,[85] and the two men want to conceive this news from Maud, therefore they push her out of the room. But this is never clearly explained;[86] it can only be inferred if readers detach from Maud's point of view.

As Victor Sage points out, Maud's "alienation effect" is a *leit motiv* that recurs in the novel. The aforementioned '*danse macabre*' is perceived as a dreadful, supernatural event by the superstitious Maud, that makes the chapter end in a Gothic climax:[87] "I […] heard her sing some of her ill-omened rhymes, as she capered solemnly, with many a grin and courtesy, among the graves and headstones towards the ruin" (42). However, in the following chapter, the girl's witness is superseded by objective testimonies, that create an anti-climax. Since Maud's point of view disappears, the Gothic element vanishes:[88] "Three years later I learned […] even phrases and looks – for the story was

84 *Ibid*.
85 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., pp. xxi,xxii.
86 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.106.
87 *Ibid.* p.116.
88 *Ibid*.

related to me by one who heard it told – and therefore I venture to narrate what at the moment I neither saw nor suspected" (42).

Initially, readers tend to trust the protagonist's narration and to see all events through the same Gothic 'film' like Maud does, because the only medium readers have to understand the events is her superstitious mind.[89] Later on, they are able to infer Maud's naivety and misperception of the events. This gives the novel a tragicomic tone, indeed readers realise how blind she is to the events and how she defends her oppressors. To protect the honour of her family, as Austin taught her, she is blindly loyal to her uncle Silas, despite the fact that he is clearly using her for his own aims. Maud is so naïve that she refuses Dudley's help to escape from Bartram-Haugh and she reports this to her uncle.[90]

Despite the acknowledgement of the narrator's naivety, the ambiguity is not solved. As Wayne Hall points out, the novel is built on a doubled point of view,[91] i.e. Maud's and the reader's point of view. The latter seems more trustworthy than the former; however Maud's credibility is many times reinforced in the novel, also because of her stubborn credulity that strengthens her point of view.[92] Moreover, she wonders whether she is mad and if she is dreaming; if she is able to ask these questions, she cannot be neither mad nor dreaming. In addition, she narrates these events as an adult,[93] who is aware of her teenage naivety.

Yet, the adult Maud's perception and description of her younger self is limited. In the very first paragraph, she says she believes to remember how she was and it is suggested that some pieces of information about her are second-handed. For example she states she looked younger than seventeen; this is a feature that only an external point of view

89 *Ibid*. pp.113,115.
90 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., p. xxiii.
91 *Ibid.* p.xxxiii.
92 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.116.
93 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.xxxiii.

can notice.[94]

Maud's narration allows readers to enter into her mind, indeed her emotions and the psychological sufferance she endures are clearly perceived,[95] but what is "dwelling within" characters is also represented by the landscape that surrounds them, which is a kind of metonymy for their inner lives and help share them with readers.[96]

In *Uncle Silas*, it is possible to see Le Fanu's rejection of the "things-are-as-they-seem world" represented in *Wylder's Hand*, that is why landscape in *Uncle Silas* becomes a metaphor of the characters' psychological states and perception of the events.[97] When Maud receives a letter from Silas, in which he tells her that she will move to Bartram-Haugh soon, a strong storm begins:

> What an awful storm! The room trembles. […] And so it was like the yelling of phantom hounds and hunters […] a furious, grand and supernatural music, which in my fancy made a suitable accompaniment to the discussion of that enigmatical person […] Uncle Silas. (154,155)

And again, when Milly and Maud leave Monica's house to come back to Bartram-Haugh, Maud describes the journey home in these terms:

> We rolled down the avenue, leaving behind us the pleasantest house and hostess in the world, and trotting fleetly into darkness toward Bartram-Haugh. […] When we reached the great gate of Bartram-Haugh it was dark. Old Crowl […] believed my uncle 'would be dead by this time'. (287)

The journey back to Silas' mansion is considered a literal immersion into the darkness, in a threatening place where its owner is thought to be dead, very differently from the reassuring Monica, described as " the pleasantest hostess".

Bartram-Haugh is always portrayed as a place of horror and seclusion; many times

94 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.104.
95 M.H. Begnal, *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, cit., p.56.
96 J. Walton, *Vision and Vacancy. The Fictions of J.S. Le Fanu*, cit., p.28.
97 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.156.

Maud's description turns the old mansion's interiors into a neglected, shapeless, maze-like horror house, resembling “that delightful old abbey in Mrs Radcliffe's romance” (207):

> Long corridors and galleries stretched away in dust and silence, and were crossed by others, whose dark arches inspired in me in the distance with an awful sort of sadness. It was plainly one of those great structures in which you might easily lose yourself […] silent staircases, dim passages, and long suites of lordly, but forsaken chambers. (207)

However, even if Maud says that she and Milly spend good time outside the house, the landscape which surrounds Bartram-Haugh is not reassuring at all:

> After a while we resumed our walk along this pretty dell, which gradually expanded into a wooded valley – level beneath and enclosed by irregular uplands […] and running into broken promontories, ending in clumps of forest trees.
>
> Just where the glen which we had been traversing expanded into this broad, but wooded valley, it was traversed by a high and close paling, which although it looked decayed, was still very strong. (209)

Even if the landscape described is a typical cultivated parkland which surrounds an English country house, this description, which highlights the natural imagery, “enclosed by irregular uplands” and characterised by “broken promontories”, conveys Bartram-Haugh an idea of seclusion and emphasises the fact that the place is isolated and cut off from the world outside.[98] Moreover, the decayed but still strong paling might recall Silas; a weak and decaying man, who nevertheless is able to imprison Maud in his mansion.

A very different landscape is represented at the end of the novel, when Maud's troubles end. The external world now is clear, pleasing and conveys a sense of relief.[99] The dark,

98 *Ibid*. p.150.
99 *Ibid.* p.155.

threatening but delightfully sublime landscape in which Maud lived in her youth, has now been replaced with a beautiful, pastoral, idyllic view:

> I rise with a great sigh, and look out on the sweet green landscape and pastoral hills, and see the flowers and birds, and the waving boughs of glorious trees. (443)

So, through the portrayal of a metaphorical landscape, Le Fanu goes beyond the typical human depictions and stresses the idea that "life is merely a reflection or expression of some static order or pattern".[100]

2.4. The Characters

Maud Ruthyn

The main characters of the novel belong to a mysterious family called Ruthyn, a surname which does not exist. Ruthyn is a town in North Wales where some relatives of Le Fanu lived. In fact he used to give characters the name of places to which he was attached. However, since a Victorian reviewer spelled it "Ruthvyn", this name may be a reference to Lord Ruthven, the main character of John Polidori's *The Vampyre*.[101]

The first member of the family that readers meet is Maud Ruthyn, the protagonist and narrator of the novel. Her character was inspired by Margaret, the protagonist of the already mentioned "Passage in the Secret History of an Irish Countess", even if some differences between the two can be spotted. Despite being both neglected by their fathers, Maud and Austin seem to have a close relationship, while Margaret is completely abandoned by her father. The prototype of Austin is however less threatening than Maud's father; unlike the *Uncle Silas*' character, Margaret is not brainwashed and blackmailed by her father into

100 *Ibid*.
101 V. Sage, "Notes", cit., p.446.

obeying him. This is why both protagonists are deceived by their uncles in different ways: Margaret cannot understand the true nature of her uncle because of his good acting, while Maud blindly trusts her father's judgement, therefore she can only consider Silas as a good and innocent man, despite all evidences.[102]

Maud resembles a heroine of romances. She compares herself to Adelaide, the protagonist of Ann Radcliffe's *Romance of the Forest*, when she explores the gloomy back passages of Bartram-Haugh[103] and, like early Gothic heroines, she is imprisoned, exploited and her life is continuously in jeopardy.[104] However, Maud is not a simple archetype or narrating voice: she is a complex, many-sided character, with a definite and recognisable personality. Maud is a character who inspires sympathy to the reader, but she cannot control her life, because she is completely subjected to her fears and terrors.[105] Maud was raised in what seems to be a "haunted atmosphere", characterised by isolation and the absence of a unified religious education. The relatives who are close to her are either fervent Anglicans (like Mrs. Rusk) or they do not belong to any definite religion and are close to agnosticism (like Monica Knollys). More importantly, her father left the Anglican Church to join Swedenborgianism, but Maud has never been taught Swedenborgian principles and people around her do not approve of Austin's belief,[106] therefore Maud cannot understand her father's religion and she is afraid of it. Eventually, this ignorance makes her so orthodox in her religion that she sees heresy everywhere[107] and is so superstitious that she is dreadfully scared of ghosts, indeed she wants Mary Quince to sleep in the room next to hers, leaving the door open to "secure [her] against ghosts" (205). Moreover, she thinks she was brought to the room of Austin's will by the ghost of her father as a warning to respect his will. Therefore, it seems that an ill social environment, made of ignorance, neglect, and alienation are the

102 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., pp. 126,127.
103 *Ibid.* p.111.
104 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.xv.
105 M.H. Begnal, *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, cit., p.59.
106 J. Walton, *Vision and Vacancy. The Fictions of J.S. Le Fanu*, cit., p.58.
107 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., pp. xxi,xxii.

real unspeakable horror, because an individual raised in such a context is not even able to choose and distinguish right over wrong, rationality over superstition, dogmatism over tolerance.[108]

Despite her education, her fearful, weak and very emotional character seems to be a kind of personal predisposition. She is a "female Quixote", who tends to interpret reality in the light of the novels, folk tales and romances she reads,[109] an attitude similar to Catherine Moreland, the protagonist of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. Like her, Maud seems to live in a self-made reality based on her readings, she states that she likes "to hear of adventures, dangers, and misfortunes, and above all, [she] love[s] […] mystery" (64), therefore she tends to see mysteries and threats everywhere. Like Emily St. Aubert, the heroine of Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, Maud is both scared and attracted by the place of her imprisonment;[110] despite being "a vale of tears" for her, she is attracted by Bartram-Haugh, indeed she considers "gloomy as well as beautiful" (334), so a sublime place.

An example of her "romance-shaped" reality is to be found in the passage where Monica, who does not trust Silas, warns Maud about him; the girl starts wondering about his personality, and this passage reveals the heroine's imaginative but also very anxious attitude:

> A cruel disciplinarian! Had I not read of such characters? – lock and keys, bread and water, and solitude! To sit locked up all night in a dark out-of-the-way room, in a great, ghostly old-fashioned house, with no one nearer than the other wing. What years of horror in one such night! […] My uncle was now a terrible old martinet, with long Bible lessons […] an awful catalogue of punishments for idleness […] I was going then, to a frightful isolated reformatory, where […] I should be subjected to a rigorous and perhaps barbarous discipline. (149,150).

108 M.H. Begnal, *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, cit., pp.33,77.
109 J. Walton, *Vision and Vacancy. The Fictions of J.S. Le Fanu*, cit., p.58.
110 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p. 111.

A similar demeanour is to be found in a passage about Bryerly, which seems to be modelled on “The Sand-Man” by E.T.A. Hoffman:[111]

> I fancied all sorts of dangers in the enigmatical smile of the lank high-priest. The image of my father, as I had seen him, it might be, confessing to this man in black, who was I knew not what, haunted me with the disagreeable uncertainties of a mind very uninstructed as to the limits of the marvellous. (13)

Beside Maud's naivety and her weak and superstitious character, in the novel there are some passages that seem to suggest that there is something wrong with her. Since Madame de la Rougierre's appearance and Austin's death, Maud seems to be even more scared, restless and upset than before. Maud has already a nervous attitude, indeed Milly nicknamed her “Mrs Bustle” (230), but as soon as she realises that her life is really endangered, she becomes frantic and starts to show physical symptoms of mental unease and hysteria: many times she trembles, faints, is easily upset by everything that surrounds her[112] and she seems to be insomniac: Monica states that her “bad nights have worn [her] out” (178). Maud's hysteria is also confirmed by her doctor, who “pronounced [her] very hysterical” (334), but also the adult Maud states that when she was younger she “almost lost [her] reason” (121) and she admits that she “distrusted” herself. (115)

After a period spent with Madame de la Rougierre, during which Maud lived in a constant fear of her, a feeling that culminates with her harassment of which Madame seems to be part, Maud has an extreme reaction, that may resemble a kind of hysterical episode:

> She hates me – she hates me, Mary Quince; and she will never stop until she has done me some dreadful injury. Oh! Will no one relieve me – will no one take her away? Oh, papa, papa, papa! You will be sorry when it is too

111 J. Walton, *Vision and Vacancy. The Fictions of J.S. Le Fanu*, cit., p.58.
112 A. Gaylin, “Ghostly Dispossessions: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*”, cit., p.99.

> late". I was crying and wringing my hands, and turning from side to side, at my wits' ends, and honest Mary Quince in vain endeavoured to quiet and comfort me. (98)

Moreover, sometimes Maud hears inexplicable voices that only she can hear. In the following passage it is not clear what is going on and readers cannot understand whether a supernatural force is manifesting, or Maud is hallucinating:

> I heard a voice near the hearth-stone, as I thought, say, in a stern whisper, 'Fly the fangs of Belisarius!'. 'What's that?' said I, turning sharply to Mary Quince. […] 'You spoke? Did you speak?' I said, catching her by the arm, very much frightened myself. 'No, Miss; no, dear!' answered she, plainly, thinking that I was a little wrong in my head. (355)

In addition, Maud seems oversensitive and she tends to overreact even to the more trivial situations, almost in a paranoid-like way:

> Notwithstanding my usual perversity, I felt myself blushing […] I felt that Lord Ilbury saw it. I saw Lady Mary's eyes for a moment resting gravely on my tell-tale – my lying cheeks […] I was angry with Cousin Monica, who, knowing my blushing infirmity, had mentioned her nephew so suddenly. […] 'My odious, stupid *perjured* face', I whispered, furiously, at the same time stamping on the floor, and giving myself quite a smart slap on the cheek. (283,284).

On the other hand, such a behaviour is also coherent with Maud's Victorian education based on manners and honour, which was instilled in her by her father. Indoctrinated by Austin, who taught her that family honour is the most important value, Maud cannot understand what is happening to her. Blind with the task of protecting her honour, she cannot see what Silas really is: a liar and a murderer, while she thinks he is a good Christian.[113] Moreover, her Victorian morality makes her so strict with herself, that she even represses her feelings towards Ilbury because "a young lady of a well-regulated mind cannot possibly care a pin about one of the opposite sex until she is very assured

113 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.124.

that he is beginning, at least, to like her" (284). This moral teaching makes her narrow-minded; she cannot accept Milly's outlandishness, she tries to teach her social norms and when her cousin behaves in a more spontaneous way, Maud is "disgusted at Milly's […] barbarism" (227). It seems that lifestyles that do not follow her strict Victorian education are unacceptable for her.

This strict morality seems to be the only real teaching that Austin gave Maud. The girl is neglected, she is not given a proper education by her father, who surprisingly has not taught his only daughter the precepts of Swedenborgianism, even if he seems to be a fervent believer.[114] As pointed out before, Maud perceives Austin as a spectre, indeed his authority over her does not stop with his death. Once again, Like *The Mysteries of Udolpho*'s heroine, Maud is haunted, harmed and terrified by Austin's spectre. Indeed his will, according to which she must move to Silas', is practically a death sentence for her.[115]

If Austin is for Maud a phantom, the former seems to perceive his daughter as an object. In his eyes, Maud is a kind of 'instrument' to restore the family honour. Maud is seen as a kind of 'bait', a final attempt to clear the family's name.[116] Indeed he ironically looks at her "as he might upon a picture"(14), and this shows how non-human she is for him.[117] In Austin's eyes, Maud is almost dehumanised; she is "accustomed to obey in silence"(100) and he does not seem interested in her well-being and health:

> When I wakened my candle had burnt out; my father, having quite forgotten me, was gone, and the room was dark and deserted. I felt cold and a little stiff, and for some seconds did not know where I was. (101)

So, like her cousins Milly and Dudley, who are neglected and used as 'instruments' as well, Maud is a "willing pawn" of the older generation's stubborn attempt to restore

114 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.165.
115 J. Walton, *Vision and Vacancy. The Fictions of J.S. Le Fanu*, cit., p.64.
116 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.123.
117 *Ibid*. p.119

their reputation, a ruthless generation, which is even ready to jeopardise their children's lives to do so.[118]

Austin Ruthyn

Austin is the patriarch of the family. He is an assertive and fearsome man, this is why Maud stands in awe for him and, even if he is her father, she calls him 'sir'. He has a great power both on the family and on society. Monica says that he "had a very great influence with the Government", indeed "they offered him something in the Colonies" (66). As it was pointed out before, Austin has a strict morality based on family honour and reputation, he is even ready to sacrifice his only daughter's life to restore it. On the other hand, he seems to love his daughter and he is ready to comfort her and acts tenderly towards her. Such mixed attitude makes him ambiguous:

> 'There, there, little Maud, you must not cry. […] If you are afraid – even *foolishly* afraid – it is enough. Be it as you say'. (89)

A tender behaviour is also shown by another moving passage, where Austin is aware that he will die soon and probably he will never see his daughter again:

> His tone was tender, so were his looks; he was looking down on me with a smile, and tears were in his eyes. […] I felt a strange thrill of surprise, delight and love, and springing up, I threw my arms about his neck and wept in silence. He, I think, shed tears also. (89)

Moreover, Maud describes him as a good and generous man:

> He was neighbourly in everything […] He had magnificent shooting, of which he was extremely liberal. He kept a pack of hounds at Dollerton, with which all his side of the county hunted through the season. He never refused any claim

118 *Ibid*. p.125.

> upon his purse which had the slightest show of reason. He subscribed to every fund, social, charitable, sporting, agricultural, no matter what, provided the honest people of his county took an interest in it, and always with a princely hand; and although he shut himself up, no one could say that he was inaccessible, for he devoted hours daily to answering letters […] He was a man of generous nature and powerful intellect. (140,141)

Austin is very shady and elusive, he seems to be a tortured, mysterious and solitary man, who secluded himself despite his role in society. He has become so isolated that he cannot understand the others, indeed he wrongly dismisses Maud and Monica's feelings and opinions about Madame de la Rougierre as mere superstitions.[119]

Maud is very aware of his father's weirdness: "my father was an odd man […] there was much about him not easily understood" (109), he "might have passed for a misanthrope or a fool" and he was "given up to oddities of a shyness which grew with years and indulgence, and became inflexible with his disappointment and afflictions" (141). Austin's daughter also says that "his oddity and shyness had quite secluded him. He refused the Lord-Lieutenancy of his county: he declined every post of personal distinction connected with it". (140)

The portrayal of Austin may be a reference to the author himself. As it was said before, after the death of his wife, he became more and more reclusive, solitary and silent.[120] This is supported by Le Fanu's nephew too. Thomas Philip Le Fanu in his book *A Memoir of Le Fanu Family* states that "there are touches in his description of Austin Ruthyn of Knowl in *Uncle Silas* which vividly recall him in his later days […] his beautiful wife died […] This bereavement I have been told changed him, made him more odd and taciturn than ever". Moreover, his nephew writes that "he was now walking up and down this spacious old room",[121] exactly like Austin at the very beginning of the novel: "He was now walking up and down in his old spacious room.

119 *Ibid*. p.114.

120 G. W. Crawford, *J. Sheridan Le Fanu, A Bio-Bibliography*, cit., p.7.

121 T.P. Le Fanu, *A Memoir of the Le Fanu Family*, Sherratt and Hughes, Manchester, 1924, p.59, quoted in W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland,* cit., p.143.

[…] It was his wont to walk up and down, thus, without speaking". (10)

However, Austin's description is also quite coherent with the representation of the male characters in Le Fanu's works: they are often melancholic, tormented, Byronic characters,[122] haunted by secrets. Reverend Jennings, the protagonist of Le Fanu's famous short story "Green Tea" is a clear example of this: he is a mysterious and tragic character, persecuted by terrible hallucinations, torn by an inner religious conflict, that made him approach to Swedenborgian theories.

Like the Reverend, Austin abandoned the Church of England and became a disciple of Swedenborg too. He has withdrawn from society when he started learning the Swedish mystic's theories with Doctor Bryerly, another Swedenborgian,[123] and an outcast too. Because of this common behaviour, it may be inferred that something scaring and mysterious concerns Swedenborgianism. The novel, however, seems to suggest that a social stigma affects this religion. Maud says that his father was considered "one of the principal gentlemen of his county, whose judgement was valuable" but "his failure in public life was due to his eccentricities" (140); since he was a trustworthy, influential and sensible man, it may be assumed that he was excluded because of his belief, that was considered eccentric.

Austin is Silas' brother, indeed they are quite similar: both are silver-haired, ill, reclusive, shady melancholic and Swedenborgians. However, their behaviour is radically different, so different that Austin can be seen as the good double of Silas. The former is burdened by a family scandal, while the latter is the cause for this scandal. Austin is a religious, generous and charitable man, while Silas is wicked, vicious and materialist. In addition, Austin can be considered a 'good' father, who is stern but kind to his daughter, while Silas represents the evil 'father',[124] who wants to kill his 'daughter'. So, like the heroine's father of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Maud's paternal figure is split.[125] Maud's

122 M.H. Begnal, *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, cit., p.72.
123 *Ibid*. p.59.
124 J. Walton, *Vision and Vacancy. The Fictions of J.S. Le Fanu*, cit., p.22.
125 *Ibid*. p.64.

moving to Silas's represents a crucial passage in the novel, when the dead Austin 'resurrects' in the form of his evil double Silas.[126] According to another interpretation, Silas may represent Austin's spirit, whose will persecutes and jeopardises Maud from the afterlife, this is why Silas is always described as a preternatural figure,[127] as will be analysed in the next section.

Austin's death and Maud's moving are the novel's turning point, which highlights explicitly that the two brothers are the double of one another; Silas is "called into being" by Austin's death, only when Maud's father dies, he appears. From this moment on, certain patterns of the plot, which were already developed before, are shown again, creating in this way a symmetry and encouraging a sense of continuity between Austin and Silas. Before and after Austin's death, the novel revolves around the relationship between an old man and a young girl, both in Knowl and Bartram-Haugh Maud's life is jeopardised, and as Austin's death is described like a journey that he has to make, the attempt on Maud's life is preceded by what she believes to be a journey to France. In addition, after her guardian's death, the girl both times departs. Also Maud's narration helps highlight a symmetry between the two brothers. Immediately after Austin's death, she dreams of him and in her vision, he says that *they* will be late at Bartram-Haugh. Again, after a failed attempt to escape from her uncle's house, Maud confronts a furious Silas and says that it seemed as if her dead father was there with her.[128]

Moreover, this duplicity is also represented by the brothers' mansions. Since Silas seems the "dead soul of Austin", Bartram-Haugh represents a "post-mortem recreation of Knowl".[129] Both houses seem haunted, but Knowl has a tradition of actual ghosts, while Bartram-Haugh is haunted by the spectral living, i.e. Maud's evil cousin Dudley, Madame de la Rougierre and, of course, Silas; even if Maud believes in their absence, they are secretly present and plot against her.[130]

126 *Ibid*. pp. 22,23.
127 *Ibid.* p.24.
128 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., pp. 167,168.
129 *Ibid*.
130 J. Walton*, Vision and Vacancy. The Fictions of J.S. Le Fanu*, cit., p.22.

These two mansions also represent the continuity between the first and the second part of the novel. Bartram, like Knowl, is an isolated country house, their visitors are the same; Madame de la Rougierre, Monica Knollys, Dr. Bryerly. The incidents that happen at Knowl are repeated at Bartram-Haugh, e.g. two undesired suitors meet Maud when she lives in Austin's mansion. They are Captain Oakley and the stranger she meets in Church Scarsdale, who is found out to be Maud's cousin Dudley Ruthyn. These two people appear again in the second part of the novel, when Maud lives by Silas's.

But the key element that proves that there is no difference between Silas and Austin is the latter's will. His will is meant to prove his belief in Silas' innocence, he seems to trust his brother completely, indeed he tells to a worried Monica that Maud will be fine with him, however, Austin asks his daughter to "make some sacrifice" (110). In addition, what Austin is trying to do is illogic, because someone's opinion does not prove someone else's innocence. The will makes sense only if any difference between Silas and Austin are dissolved, only if Silas wrote it:[131] the word "sacrifice" would be referred to Maud's life, since Silas' ultimate plan is to kill his niece and to inherit Austin's money. To do so, he needs to be close to her and to be his ward.

In Le Fanu's works, doubles and metaphorical returns from the dead are usually found. So, the author harks back to the eighteenth-century Two-Brothers-plot,[132] turning it into the archetypical Gothic theme of the Double. This topic, which emerged in Romantic fiction and characterised all nineteenth century,[133] portrays the conflictual relationship between the brothers as a dark, deadly struggle between the Self and the terrible *Doppelgänger*, the uncanny Other,[134] which in modern Freudian terms is known as the subconscious.

131 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., pp.167,169,170.
132 J. Walton, *Vision and Vacancy. The Fictions of J.S. Le Fanu*, cit., p.75.
133 J. Herdman, *The Double in the Nineteenth-Century Fiction,* Macmillan, London, 1990, p.11.
134 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.6.

Silas Ruthyn

Silas is the villain of the novel, the mysterious and terrible uncle who haunts and threatens Maud's life. He is described as an old, weak man, who was a libertine and dissolute in his youth; Monica tells Maud that "he was a man of fashion" but "very vicious"(157), "fond of his pleasures" (65) and "wild and selfish" (256). He was born in 1771, and, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, he lived a dissolute youth, which was characterised by laudanum, gambling and loans from his brother.[135] He used to gamble a lot, indeed he has "the self-command which is learned at the gaming-table". (315) Because of this behaviour, he ran up debts and even if Austin lent him money, his help was not sufficient. Because of Silas' dissolution and his political positions, the model for his character might be the young Richard Brinsley Sheridan, who was rakish, had "hypnotic eyes" like Silas and was a Whig. Indeed he managed the publicity for the Rockingham Whigs and for this reason his early biographers shed a bad light on him. The novel suggests that Silas, like Austin, was a Whig and he was boycotted by the Tory county.[136] Austin says that he was victim of a "cowardly and preposterous slander, originating in police malice".(177) Moreover, Silas seems to have libertarian, progressive ideas. In a letter to Monica, he states that "young people have too little liberty" and that his "principle has been to make little free men and women of them from the first. In morals […] in intellect […] and it only begins where constraint ends". (282) Therefore, Le Fanu may have pointed out an analogy between the demonising of Silas and of Sheridan. Another similarity between the two men is Silas' style and manners. In the novel Maud says that he "welcomed [her] with a courtly grace which belonged to another age" (201), and Silas dresses in the style of the previous century, the time when Sheridan lived and wrote his plays.[137]

Silas carelessly married a country girl from Wales, whom he started to ill-treat soon

135 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.xxiv.
136 *Ibid.*
137 *Ibid*. p.xxv.

after the wedding, which ended tragically. Because of Silas' behaviour, the girl started drinking heavily and eventually died. Moreover, Monica says that Mr Charke, a man with whom Silas used to play cards, committed suicide in Bartram-Haugh, where he was a guest and after that event, he was suspected to have murdered Charke. Therefore, many bad stories were told about Silas and, even if many years have gone by, people still think he is a murderer.

Despite his tormented past, initially readers do not understand his wickedness; his true nature will be revealed only towards the end of the novel, when it is found out that Silas is a really dangerous man and Maud's life is really endangered, because he actually murdered Mr Charke and he is ready to kill her too.

However, initially a great ambiguity is shed on Silas; clearly there is something wrong with him, but the characters' narrations try to show the opposite. It is told that Silas has changed, he has become a kind and religious man, a Swedenborgian like his brother, and Austin calls him his "oppressed and unhappy brother".(177) Monica and Bryerly's negative opinions about Silas is what makes readers doubt about the man's truthfulness. However later on, Maud's cousin tells her that "of *course* [she] never suspected him" (158) of being a murderer. In addition, at the beginning of the novel, the doctor cannot be trusted, because Maud described him as a mysterious and dark man, and since readers experience the events through Maud's point of view, they tend to trust her. The most convincing evidence of Silas' innocence is Maud's opinion of him. In her eyes he is:

> A poor and shunned old man, occupying a lonely house and place that did not belong to him, married to degradation, with a few years of suspected and solitary life before him and then swift oblivion his best portion. (186)

and again she says:

> I, gazing into vacancy, sent him in a chariot of triumph, chapletted, ringed, and robed through the city of imagination, crying after him, 'Innocent! Innocent! Martyr and crowned!' (167)

However, when Maud moves to Silas's, the man's wickedness becomes clearer and clearer. Austin told Maud that his brother "cares less about his children than I about you". (112) Unlike Maud, whose father provided her a governess, Silas' daughter Milly is extremely neglected and uneducated. Moreover, instead of being worried about this, Silas sarcastically scorns her in front of Maud. In this passage, Silas mentions some characters of Shakespeare's last work *The Tempest*. In a kind of symbolic stage performance of the play, he associates Bartram-Haugh to the island where the play takes place, Milly plays the part of Miranda, Silas casts himself as a "sick old Prospero", while Caliban seems to represent Dudley,[138] indeed in the novel he is a brute, violent and degenerate.

> 'I need not introduce my daughter; she has saved me that mortification. You'll find her, I believe, […] a very rustic Miranda, and fitted rather for the society of Caliban than of a sick old Prospero. Is it not so, Millicent?
> The old man paused sarcastically for an answer, with his eyes fixed severely on my odd cousin […]
> 'I don't know who they be – neither one nor t'other'.
> 'Very good, my dear', he replied, with a little mocking bow. 'You see, my dear Maud, what a Shakespearean you have got for a cousin. (201)

and again:

> 'No – a!" exclaimed Cousin Milly's lusty voice. […] She was seated on a very high old-fashioned chair; she has palpably been asleep. […] 'Have you anything to remark about Noah?' inquired her father, with a polite inclination and an ironical interest.
> 'No – a', she repeated in the same blunt accents; 'I didn't snore; did I? No – a."
> The old man smiled and shrugged a little at me – it was the smile of disgust. (204)

Beyond his daughter, Silas does not seem to care about his brother too; he asks Maud about Austin's disease but only for selfish reasons. He "fancied that there might be some

138 V. Sage, "Notes", cit., pp. 462,463.

family predisposition to organic disease, of which his brother died", so "his questions were directed rather to the prolonging of his own life than to the better understanding of my dear father's death".(202)

Another important episode that suggests Silas' wickedness is when, at Bartram-Haugh, Maud looks at a book with a coloured engraving representing a girl in the woods, who is giving meat to some wolves in order to escape from them. This landscape immediately reminds Maud of Windmill Wood, where she and Milly usually go walking. Moreover, in her mind, she connects this inscription with a Van Dyke's picture of Belisarius, called "Date Obolum Belisario", which really hung over Le Fanu's mantelpiece. The Latin title means "Give a Penny to Belisarius". The picture represents this great Roman, blinded and begging on the street. Maud sees Silas as the beggar, a kind of "Christ-figure", a poor, innocent slave, whom she must help with her money. But then, she falls in a reverie and she hears a whisper saying "Fly the fangs of Belisarius!" and in this sentence the uncle's true nature is revealed: Silas is actually the wolf and Maud is the girl who is giving him meat, i.e. money, not to be killed. So, in Maud's indoctrinated mind, Silas is a "martyred hero", although the truth is that Silas is the "Big Bad Wolf".[139]

Austin says that his brother "has grown religious"(111), he has become a Swedenborgian and he sometimes seems maniacally religious.[140] Despite this, Silas does not seem really committed. While talking to Maud, he utters "Egad!"(325), which is a blasphemy.[141] In fact, unlike Bryerly and Austin, Silas is a "fake Swedenborgian", who uses opium to have those visions that Swedenborg considered the manifestation of a true inner faith.[142]

Silas states many times that "to earth and its interests, as well as to its pleasures" he has "long been dead" (127). However, it is soon understood that he is still a vicious

139 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.121.
140 M.H. Begnal, *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, cit., p.57.
141 V. Sage, "Notes", cit., p.471.
142 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.xxx.

man. He has “strange collapses”, he falls in “ 'queerish' states” (230) and sometimes he cannot wake up in the morning. As Doctor Bryerly points out, this happens because he is used to taking huge quantities of opium and laudanum.[143] This behaviour has damaged his health severely.

The Swedenborgian says that “these men of pleasure, who have no other pursuit, use themselves up mostly, and pay a smart price for their sins”(243); as it happens in “A Passage”, the guilty conscience eventually leads to self-destruction.[144] Silas commits suicide by taking an excessive dose of a laudanum at the very end of the novel. So, paradoxically self-murder seems to be both the epitome of negation and self-possession,[145] because it symbolises the final awareness of the villains' wicked actions and their remorse.

Silas is very often associated to decadence. Observing him, Maud says that he “was a very statue of forsaken dejection and decay”(340); he is “sad” and “afflicted”. His health is said to be “wretched” and “miserable”(114), he is weak and has no strength. That is why he is the only character who never leaves his mansion and he seldom leaves his room.[146] He always seems to be “in a moribund state”.[147] He falls in frequent trance states, and once his life is seriously jeopardised, because he falls in a coma after an opium overdose. The sense of decadence that surrounds his character is an anticipation of his final death.

Like Silas, Bartram-Haugh, his mansion, symbolises decadence too. Maud's description of her uncle's house reminds of a sublime decadent landscape:

> The bright moon shining full on the white front of the old house revealed […] also its stained and moss-grown front. Two giant trees, overthrown at last by the recent storm, lay with their upturned roots, and their yellow foliage still flickering on the sprays that were to bloom no more, where they had fallen, at

143 M.H. Begnal, *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, cit., p.57.
144 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.79.
145 *Ibid.* p.80.
146 *Ibid.* p.160.
147 J. Walton, *Vision and Vacancy. The Fictions of J.S. Le Fanu*, cit., p.22.

> the right side of the court-yard. […] All this gave to the aspect of Bartram a forlorn character of desertion and decay. […] We drew up before the lordly door-step of this melancholy mansion. (194)

The sentence "that were to bloom no more" echoes "the days that are no more"; the elegiac chorus of the lyric "Tears, Idle Tears" by Lord Alfred Tennyson, from his poem *The Princess*, published in 1847.[148]

> Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
> Tears from the depth of some divine despair
> Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
> In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,
> And thinking of the days that are no more.[149]

The assonance with these extraordinary verses by the Poet Laureate, so evocative and melancholic, helps underline the sense of decadence that Bartram-Haugh conveys the narrator. The mansion is always surrounded by an "air of decay" that is "heightened by the fallen trees"(206). So, exactly like the Ruthyn family, Bartram-Haugh is decayed but it is still alive.[150]

As it was pointed out before, Silas is often described as an undead preternatural being or an evil conjurer. Monica repeatedly associates him with the characters of supernatural fairy tales,[151] saying that she can "fancy him an old enchanter in his castle, waving his familiar spirits on the wind".(156) Both her and Maud associate him with occultism and black magic. Seeing him pale and with "a death-like smile" (250), Monica ironically wonders if his aspect was given by necromancy. When Maud sees him dressed "in necromantic black"(205), she alludes to Goethe's *Faust*,[152] linking him to Mephistopheles. Like a conjurer, he seems to be inside her mind and to control it: this

148 V. Sage, "Notes", cit., p. 462.
149 A. Tennyson, *Selected Poems,* ed. C. Ricks, London, Penguin Classics, 2007, p.10.
150 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p. 166.
151 V. Sage, "Notes", cit., p.460.
152 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.165.

may be a reason why she is so blind to his true wicked nature.[153] An episode that might suggest Silas' control of Maud's mind is when she unconsciously writes "£20,000. Date Obolum Belisario"(354), as if Silas was trying to manipulate her mind to convince her to give him the money he needs to pay his debts.

Silas "represents the central ghostly presence of the novel";[154] indeed he is one of the clearest examples of the aforementioned "spectralization of the other". Maud, who is terribly afraid of him, 'spectralizes' him continually. She always associates him with death. When they first meet, Maud says he is like marble and his look is monumental, two adjectives that immediately remind to tombstones.[155] Even if she met him in the flash, she wonders if "after all, was he more than a shadow" (250). In her memories, she pictures him "ashy with […] pallor […] a face so dazzlingly pale and […] hollow, fiery, awful eyes. It sometimes seemed as if […] I had seen a ghost" (250), so again she uses many terms connected to death.[156] Silas himself connects his body with death. When talking to Monica, he repents of a revengeful thought, saying that "never breast was more dead than mine to the passions and ambitions of the world", therefore he calls this vindictive impulse a "galvanic spasm of a corpse" (252). Galvanism was an experimental technique which was theorised by Luigi Galvani, who stated that corpses might be brought back to life through electric shocks. This is what Mary Shelley's notorious doctor Victor Frankenstein tragically managed to achieve,[157] and maybe, when Le Fanu wrote this passage, he had this popular novel in mind.

Milly also states that Silas looked almost dead; as it was pointed out before, he suffers from opium-induced lethargy and trance states. However, since this novel is based on symbols and recurrent images, this explicit association cannot be ignored, also because it is repeated many times in the novel.[158]

153 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.xvi.
154 A. Gaylin, "Ghostly Dispossessions: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.96.
155 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.162.
156 *Ibid*.
157 V. Sage, "Notes", cit., p. 467.
158 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., pp.162,163.

In a chapter called “An Apparition”, Maud states that there was a period when she never saw her uncle, despite the fact they live in the same house. One day the man suddenly appears, exactly as if he was a phantom:

> When I entered the room my heart beat so fast that I could hardly speak. The tall form of Uncle Silas rose before me […] He darted from under his brows a wild, fierce glance at old Wyat, and pointed to the door imperiously with his skeleton finger. […] His white head bowed forward, the phosphoric glare of his strange eyes shone upon me from under his brows – his finger nails just rested on the table. (329)

In this passage, Silas does not seem human but rather an undead creature or a ghost. This idea is conveyed by the choice of precise words. His fingers are so tiny to be “skeletal”, his glare is “phosphoric”, and his body seems a shadow: it is a “tall form” that suddenly rises in front of Maud. Moreover, the narrator overreacts to his presence, indeed her emotional response does not seem suited for this situation: she has already talked to her uncle many times. Instead, her freezing fear suggests that she has seen something terrible and unexplainable, like a ghost.

The same idea is more explicitly conveyed by another passage. Silas is seriously ill and unconscious. Maud is assisting him, when the man suddenly wakes up:

> I do not recollect any sound whatever; but instinctively I glanced into the mirror, and my eyes were instantly fixed by what I saw.
>
> The figure of Uncle Silas rose up, and dressed in a long white morning gown, slid over the end of the bed, and with two or three swift noiseless steps, stood behind me, with a death-like scowl and a simper. Preternaturally tall and thin, he stood for a moment almost touching me […]
>
> It was cold, but he did not seem to feel it. With the same inflexible scowl and smile, he continued to look out for several minutes, and then with a great sigh, he sat down on the side of his bed. (292-293)

Here Silas is described as a typical ghost; he is a white and silent dead shadow. Indeed he wears a white gown, he is tall, thin and he does not walk, but he noiselessly “slides”

closer to Maud, looking at her with a “death-like scowl” and goes away with a sigh. Moreover, even if it is winter, he is ill, aged and dressed lightly, he does not feel cold, as if he was not alive.

Because of his liminal nature of ghost and yet human, it can be stated that Silas is a secularised spirit, that somehow represents the horror uncanniness of everyday life. If in the past demons, witches, and ghosts were real threats that haunted people's lives, in the industrialised and capitalist XIX century the sinister paranormal figures are ordinary and belong to daily life, while real supernatural ghosts are not scaring anymore. The real threats are the others, especially the close ones, who are able to persecute, to attract innocents to them under false pretences, and to kill and replace the positive figures that love them. These people act wickedly not because they are possessed by the devil, but by the evil spirits of their desires and ambitions[159] (often associated to greediness, as in Silas' case).

Another interesting aspect that concerns Silas is his portrait. This picture was painted when he was young, and is astonishingly beautiful:

> It was a full-length, and represented a singularly handsome young man, slender, elegant, in a costume then quite obsolete […] and the hair long and brushed back. There was a remarkable elegance and a delicacy of features, but also a character of resolution and ability that quite took the portrait out of the mere fops of fine men. (18)

Looking at this portrait, Maud sees her uncle for the first time and she is immediately fascinated by this picture. She thinks that the man portrayed must be “gentle”, “benignant” (238) and “a very handsome man” (18), but she is “bewitched into pastness and deadness”. The picture is both in and out of time; it was painted forty years before and yet Maud is excited by the thought that the very subject is still alive,[160] in her mind she pictures her uncle in that handsome, young shape. She is also fatally deceived by it.

159 J. Walton, *Vision and Vacancy. The Fictions of J.S. Le Fanu*, cit., pp. 32,40,73.
160 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.119.

Indeed it seems that the more she looks at it, the more she is convinced of his false innocence and kind-heartedness. She even turns the portrait of her vicious uncle into a picture of Christ, superimposing the two figures.[161]

> 'Innocent! Innocent! Martyr and crowned! All the virtues and honesties, reason and conscience, in myriad shapes […] joined in the jubilant acclamation […] great organs and choirs through open cathedral gates, rolled anthems of praise and thanksgiving, and bells rang out, and cannons sounded, and the air trembled with the roaring harmony; and Silas Ruthyn, the full-length portrait, stood in the burnished chariot, with a proud, sad, clouded face, that rejoiced not with the rejoicers, and behind him the slave, thin as a ghost, white-faced, and sneering something in his ear. (167)

The picture she seems to refer to may be "The Temptation of Christ" and the "slave" she mentions might be the Devil which has been defeated by Christ, therefore he has been "put behind" him.[162] Moreover, this passage shows both the attraction and obsession she has for Silas' portrait and her Christian faith.[163] At the same time, this superimposition might represent Maud's wronged opinion of Silas; a ghostly slave hides behind the Christ-like figure of Silas. This slave might represent the uncle's true evil nature, which is hidden behind Maud's distorted perception of him.

So, the picture and her fantasy connected to it are for Maud crucial evidences that prove her father's belief on Silas' guiltlessness and persuade her to help Austin.[164]

In the painting, Silas has the characteristics of a "Byronic stereotype".[165] However, the portrait may have been inspired by true living men. A possible model for this portrait could have been George Colman the Younger, a writer of dramatic comedies. This author was a friend of Le Fanu's father and in the novel there is an allusion to his work *The Heir at Law*. But, more probably, the model was George Romney's portrait of

161 *Ibid*. p.120.
162 V. Sage, "Notes", cit., p.461.
163 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.121.
164 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.160.
165 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.119.

William Beckford, the tormented and reclusive author of *Vathek*. Indeed it fits both Maud's description of the painting:[166] "a man […] elegant, in a costume quite obsolete, though I believe it was seen at the beginning of the century"(18) and Austin's depiction of his brother as "unspeakable unfortunate or unspeakably vicious" (17). Beckford was also a Whig Member of Parliament and, because of a scandalous homosexual relationship with William Courtenay, he fell in disgrace and the two lovers had to leave the Country. Austin refers to the motto of the Courtenay's family (Ubi lapsus? Quid feci?, i.e. In what was my fault? What have I done?) when he is trying to convince Maud to help him restore his family's lost pride.[167]

The theme of the haunting or cursed portrait dominates Gothic tradition. Many authors dealt with this topic; Horace Walpole, Charles Maturin in *Melmoth the Wanderer*, Bram Stoker in "The Judge's House" and of course Edgar Allan Poe in his masterpiece "The Oval Portrait", where the picture's subject steps out the frame and comes to life, substituting its model and dreadfully mixing art and life.[168] Another famous novel that deals with this Gothic motive is Oscar Wilde's manifest of Aestheticism *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). Even if this novel was written twenty-six years after *Uncle Silas*, both works seem to deal with the theme of the deceiving beauty. As Maud is mislead by the beauty of Silas' picture, Basil's "full-length portrait of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty",[169] which somehow becomes alive after Dorian's pact with the Devil, deceives all characters. However, the protagonists' handsome aspect hides a wicked and vicious personality. Like Silas, Dorian is vicious, libertine, insensitive towards the other people's emotions and a murderer.

166 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.xxiv.
167 *Ibid*.
168 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.118.
169 O. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* London, Collins Classics, 2010, pp.1,2.

Milly and Dudley Ruthyn

Milly is Silas' good, kind-hearted daughter and Maud's cousin and friend. She is a tragicomic character: her distinctive dialect and rustic manners are amusing, but her lack of education highlights Silas' complete carelessness of her. She is left unattended "like a weed" and utterly unaware of her heritage and social position.[170] Maud understands this very well:

> She had no domestic companion of the least pretensions to education – that she ran wild about the place – never, except in church […] and that the little she knew of reading and writing had been picked up, in desultory half-hours, from a person who did not care a pin about her manners or decorum, and perhaps rather enjoyed her grotesqueness – and that no one who was willing to take the least trouble about her was competent to make her a particle more refined than I saw her. (205)

Even if "this creature" has "no more education than a dairy-maid", Milly has "a sweet voice", "a talent for drawing" and "ten times the cleverness of half the circulating library misses one meets with"(208), therefore Maud decides to teach her standard English and good manners.

Maud and Milly's relationship is quite a secondary topic in the novel, however is very well-analysed. Le Fanu talks about the friendship between the two girls in a very touching and delicate way. Their bond becomes closer and closer as the novel progresses. His sensitiveness to female characters and relationships may have been inspired by his personal life. Women played a key role in his biography; the author's wife tragically died and he had to bring up alone his son and two daughters, to whom he was very closed. Moreover, he was deeply shocked by his cousin Frances' suicide.[171]

So, the differences between the two girls and Milly's 'love-hate' friendship with

170 M.H. Begnal, *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, cit., p.59.
171 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.5.

Maud are portrayed in a very clear and tender way.

Milly dresses with “black leather boots, with leather buttons, and, for a lady, prodigiously thick soles, which reminded […] of navvy boots”. Her hands “though pretty, were much sunburnt indeed”(196): 'navvy' was the name with which Victorian itinerant labourers were called[172] and the sunburnt skin was typical of peasants and rustic people. Maud, instead, is very pale and well-dressed. This is why sometimes Milly seems envious of Maud and feels 'inferior' and inadequate;

> 'Are you vexed, Milly'? I asked, for both her tone and looks were angry.
> 'Yes, I am vexed; and why not, lass?' […]
> 'Why look at that fellow, Carysbroke: he took no more notice to me than a dog, and kep' talking to you all the time' […]
> 'I can't talk like other folk – ladies, I mean. Every one laughs at me; an' I'm dressed like a show, I am. It's a shame! I saw Polly Shives […] laughing at me in church last Sunday […] An' I know I'm queer. It's a shame, it is. Why should *I* be so rum? It is a shame! I don't want to be so, nor it isn't my fault'.
> And poor Milly broke into a flood of tears. (221)

Milly's brother Dudley is neglected by Silas too. So, like in Milly's case his lack of education can be easily inferred from his rustic and rude manners. However, unlike his sister, Dudley is wicked, ruthless and selfish. He represents the final degradation of the Ruthyn family.[173] Indeed Maud thinks that Silas is very disappointed in him, because Dudley is “an outcast, a Tony Lumpkin”(268), i.e. the deceptive wicked rustic character of Oliver Goldsmith's comedy *She Stoops to Conquer*. In the play he deceives his mother and other travellers making them think they are going on a journey, but in reality the couch is comically led in a circle, near their house.[174] This can also be seen as a comic version of what happens to Maud in the last part of the novel: she is made believe she is going to France to reach Milly, instead she is brought back to Bartram-Haugh and

172 V. Sage, “Notes”, cit., p.462.

173 M. Howes, “Misalliance and Anglo-Irish Tradition in Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*”, in *Nineteenth Century Literature Sept. 1992, Vol. 47, No.2*, Berkeley (CA), University of California Press, 1992, p.175.

174 V. Sage, “Notes”, cit., pp. 468,473.

imprisoned.

Dudley recalls a younger version of Silas and he seems to follow his father's footsteps. He is “addicted to drinking and quarrelling”(349) and he “plays and he is very much in debt”(272). Moreover he rejects religion. Milly tells to a disconcerted Maud that “he wasn't in a church these five years […] and then only to meet a young lady”(265). Dudley is also a libertine. Such a behaviour can be easily inferred from his relationship with Maud, which is full of softened sexual overtones, implied in his comments on her physical aspect and in his impudent and quite violent attempts to kiss her:[175]

> He jumped from his elevated seat on the sideboard, and came swaggering toward me, with an odious grin, and arms extended. I started to my feet, absolutely transported with fury.
> 'Drat me, if she baint agoing to fight me!' he chuckled humorously.
> 'Come, Maud, you would not be ill-natured, sure? Arter all, it's only our duty. Governor bid us kiss, didn't he?
> 'Don't – *don't*, sir. Stand back, or I'll call the servants'. (267)

Even if Maud's cousin is interested in her and Silas wants him to marry her, Dudley is already married to Sarah Matilda, whom he treats violently and neglects, as Silas treated his wife.

However, despite his wicked actions, it is eventually found out that Dudley is totally manipulated by Silas; the man persuades his son to kill Maud, but he mistakenly murders his partner in crime, Madame de la Rougierre. After the murder, he realises the severity of his actions and how his father manipulated him:

> 'Look what you made me do!' he said, maniacally. […]
> 'Yes, you damned old murderer; I've a mind to do for you'.
> 'There, Dudley, like a dear boy, don't give way; it's done. Right or wrong we can't help it. 'You must be quiet' said the old man, with a stern gentleness.
> Dudley groaned. […]
> 'Oh, oh, my God!' said Dudley, hoarsely, and he wiped his forehead with his open

175 A. Gaylin, “Ghostly Dispossessions: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*”, cit., p.88.

hand. […] 'You said 'twouldn't hurt her. If I'd a know she'd a screeched like that I'd never a done it. 'Twas a damn lie. You're the damndest villain on earth'. (435,436).

Madame de la Rougierre

Madame de la Rougierre is one of the strangest, most original and grotesque characters in the novel. She is very important because her figure allows the author to explore the typical topic of the condition of governesses. And because of this, to a certain extent, *Uncle Silas* can also be considered a Victorian Governess Novel.

In the XIX Century many middle-class families hired governesses, also because at the time it was a status-symbol, that represented the family's financial wealth. According to the 1861 census, there were 24,700 governesses in England. However, when the number of governesses grew, society became suspicious about them and wondered whether they actually were good educators for their children.[176] In a 1902 article of the magazine *The Parents Review*, Mrs R.L. Devonshire, a French translator, recalled that "the idea of the coming governess was held up to children as a terror. […] She was expected to be thin, middle-aged and spectacled, fearfully strict".[177] Governesses were generally imagined as harsh educators, indeed they were exploited by other members of the household to keep children quiet and obedient and, despite their fearful presence, they were many times ill-treated by employers, especially by the pupils' mothers, who sometimes suffered of a kind of inferiority complex, because, despite belonging to a lower social class, governesses usually had a better education.[178] Charlotte Brontë commented on this, quoting an episode when a child told her that he loved her, and his

176 T. Mangum, "Sheridan Le Fanu's Ungovernable Governesses", in *Studies in the Novel* Summer 1997, Vol 29, No.2, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, pp. 216,217.
177 R.L. Devonshire, "Resident Governess", in *The Parents Review 1902, No.13*, quoted in T. Mangum, "Sheridan Le Fanu's Ungovernable Governesses", cit., p.216.
178 T. Mangum, "Sheridan Le Fanu's Ungovernable Governesses", cit., pp. 215,220.

mother very coldly answered “Love the *governess*!”.[179] Moreover, working women, including governesses, were not well-regarded in society; they were often seen like prostitutes, because the nexus between 'service' and money was explicit. In addition, in the 1840s William Tait, an Edinburgh surgeon, conducted an investigation into prostitution and found out that many governesses actually became prostitutes. Not by chance Madame de la Rougierre is several times linked to prostitution. So, in some cases, these women were considered as morally debauched and a possible threat to the family's respectability and morality. Despite the campaign launched by the Governesses' Benevolent Institution, these stereotypes persisted and governesses were usually exploited, ill-treated with repeated humiliations and left alone, therefore many of them became alcoholics or were hospitalised in asylums.

The governess was also seen as an ambiguous and liminal figure; on the one hand, she was considered a “pathetic, single woman”, but on the other she was seen as a mysterious, sharp woman, able to indoctrinate the employers' children.[180]

If in the typical Victorian Governess novel, the main protagonist is generally a good, loyal heroine, like Jane Eyre, in other works this figure becomes a villain, like the disturbed unnamed protagonist of Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* and of course Madame de la Rougierre. Le Fanu replaces the eighteenth-century Gothic abbess with a nineteenth-century Gothic governess, who is in cahoots with Silas to steal Maud's money and property.[181]

Le Fanu portrays an evil and Gothicised version of the governess. This “gender-ambivalent” character has all the characteristics a governess should not have; she is wicked, violent, duplicitous and she is even an alcoholic.[182] 'Madame de la Rougierre' is actually a nickname, her real name is Mademoiselle Blassemare; 'blasse' reminds of the French 'blaser' that means becoming apathetic because of strong drinking, so her name

179 *Ibid*. p. 216.
180 *Ibid.* pp.217,222,223.
181 A. Gaylin, “Ghostly Dispossession: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*”, cit., p.89.
182 T. Mangum, “Sheridan Le Fanu's Ungovernable Governesses” cit., p.214.

is an ironic reference to alcoholism.[183]

M.me de la Rougierre unsettles the already precarious balance and organization of the mansion's household: she replaces Maud's parents and takes control of her life, but she does not provide her with a good education. Indeed the girl does not seem to be taught any of the conventional subjects, and this also represents Austin's failure both as parent and employer.[184] Moreover, Madame's broken English may suggest that she is not well-educated which is very weird for a governess. From the very beginning it is clear both to characters and readers that she is a villain. She ill-treats Maud, she threatens her and she even hurts her physically:

> 'Ah! You are not such little goose – you do know everything of course. Come, come, tell me, little obstinate, otherwise I will break your little finger. Tell me everything'. 'I know nothing of papa's will. You don't know, Madame, how you pain me. Do let us speak of something else'.
> 'You do know, and you must tell, petite dur-tête, or I will break a your leetle finger'.
> With which words she seized that joint, and laughing spitefully, she twisted it suddenly back. I screamed; she continued to laugh.
> 'Will you tell'?
> 'Yes, yes! Let me go!' I shrieked.
> She did not release it, however, immediately, but continued her torture and discordant laugher. (36,37)

and again:

> 'You shall do wat I tell you!' exclaimed she
> 'Let go my arm, Madame, you hurt me', I cried.
> She had griped my arm very firmly in her great bony hand […]. 'Let me go' I repeated shrilly, for the pain increased.
> 'La!' she cried with a smile of rage and a laugh, letting me go and shoving me backward at the same time, so that I had a rather dangerous tumble. (84)

183 V. Sage, "Notes", cit., p.461.
184 T. Mangum, "Sheridan Le Fanu's Ungovernable Governesses", cit., p.226.

Madame's wickedness and Maud's endangerment are soon clear to the female characters, who suspect of her from her first appearance at the Ruthyn mansion Knowl. The name is significant because it suggests Madame de la Rougierre's real purpose (Know-all).[185] Monica tells her cousin that Madame "*must* be [her] enemy"(80), that she is "unscrupulous"(80). She warns Maud telling her to "bridle [her] tongue, mind and govern [her] conduct"(80). She must be "secret and vigilant"(80) and not "let her meddle with [her] food"(81). In addition, Madame seems to be a female "wandering Jew", to whom she refers while singing a ballad. This figure is a variant of Cain, who was cursed by God and doomed to wander lonely for all his life.[186]

However, Madame's evil nature is more explicitly expressed when Maud lives in Bartram-Haugh. Without Austin's authority over her, her manipulations become actual threats and attempts on Maud's life. She is paid twice by Dudley to lure Maud into traps that would allow him to rape and eventually marry her. At Bartram-Haugh, Madame conspires with Silas. He gives her the key of the girl's boudoir, she is allowed to read her letters and she collaborates with the man in the organisation of the girl's kidnap. The affiliation between the governess and the wicked uncle becomes clear when Maud tells Silas her past experience with Madame and how she hurt her, expecting that in this way she would be dismissed,[187] but her uncle pretends not to believe her:

> It was quite in vain my reiterating my statement, backing it with the most earnest asseverations. I was beating the air. It did not seem to reach his mind. It was all received with a simper of feeble incredulity.
> He patted and smoothed my head – he laughed gently […] while I insisted; and Madame protested her purity in now tranquil floods of innocent tears, and murmured mild and melancholy prayers for my enlightenment and reformation.
> 'There now, dear Maud, we have heard enough; it is, I do believe, a delusion'. (373)

185 *Ibid*. p.224.
186 V. Sage, "Notes", cit., pp.449,450.
187 T. Mangum, "Sheridan Le Fanu's Ungovernable Governesses", cit., p.228.

Madame is not a lady at all: she is a vulgar woman as her behaviour and manners show. She is very sly and has a great ability to deal with life difficulties.[188] She is a thief and is associated with the men who harass Maud in the first part of the novel. She is shabbily dressed, she uses a wig to hide her baldness, which is probably a consequence of syphilis.[189] She is used to make a "dowdy toilet"(371), and she talks rudely, using insults and French vulgar expressions. However, many times she successfully pretends to be innocent and blames Maud, stressing her need for a good education. Moreover, she pretends to be ill in order not to work but to dedicate to her vices. She is able to trick the doctor and to be given laudanum and brandy. She also manages to obtain James's powder, which was used for headaches, but she probably uses it to cure her hangovers.[190]

Madame is portrayed as a wicked, vulgar and vicious character. This is also probably linked to prejudices regarding French people, which was common at the time. Mrs. Rusk says that she hates "them Frenchwomen; they're not natural"(26), she calls her the "inauspicious foreigner"(37), "the old French hypocrite"(98) and "old cat" (38). The latter expression meant both an unpleasant, nosy woman ("cat" reminds of "catty"), and it is a term that was also associated to a "drunken, violent prostitute".[191] The name of the governess recalls this prejudice too. 'Madam' was a way in which brothel-keepers were called[192] and 'Rouge' is a reference to cosmetics, which at the time were not used by ladies.[193] In the novel the governess is indeed explicitly associated to prostitution. When Maud and Madame are in a hotel in London, the landlady, who knows the governess, says that the latter "had at one time driven a kind of trade, no doubt profitable enough, in escorting young ladies to establishments on the Continent"(409). Even if Maud naively thinks the landlady is talking about girls who are going to take

188 M.H. Begnal, *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, cit., p.59.
189 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.123.
190 V. Sage, "Notes", cit., p.450.
191 *Ibid*. p.449.
192 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.123.
193 V. Sage, "Notes", cit., p.448.

vows, readers instantly understand that these “establishments” are brothels and she is referring to prostitution.[194]

The name Rougierre may also refer to the *tricoteuse*, which was the satirical portrayal of a French woman in the cartoons who was represented while knitting next to the guillotine in their *bonnets rouges*[195], i.e. a Phrygian cap. In the novel, Madame is clearly connected to the French turmoil of that time. In her grotesque '*danse macabre*' she performs at the Scarsdale churchyard, she repeats many times the expression *ça ira*, which is the refrain of “La Carmagnole”, a classical revolutionary song.[196] Since the novel was written in the 1860s, the “grim, grenadier lady”, as Madame is called twice, may be a reference to the recent panic felt in that period. In 1859, Louis Napoleon threatened to invade Britain,[197] and, as some letters to his sister suggest, Le Fanu was very worried about the French president's expansionist aims. His preoccupation was also enhanced by the fact that some Irish Republicans in Paris and Dublin wanted to take advantage of this invasion and negotiate separately with the French.[198]

The figure of the French governess was familiar to Le Fanu. When he was a child, his mother employed a French governess to look after him and his siblings and to teach them French. A rule was introduced, according to which all conversations at meal times should be held in this language.[199] Indeed it was not unusual for middle-class children to have foreign governesses. The European revolutions of the late 1840s caused a great migration from Italy, Germany and France to the UK. According to the 1861 census records 1,408 foreign governesses worked in Great Britain.[200] Though these ladies were praised for their high education and for the fact that they could speak many languages, the other members of the household were sceptical towards these foreign women,

194 T. Mangum, “Sheridan Le Fanu's Ungovernable Governesses”, cit., p. 228.
195 V. Sage, “Introduction to *Uncle Silas*”, cit., p.xxvi.
196 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit.,p.122.
197 V. Sage, “Introduction to *Uncle Silas*”, cit., p.xxvi.
198 V. Sage, “Notes”, cit., p.454.
199 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.136.
200 T. Mangum, “Sheridan Le Fanu's Ungovernable Governesses”, cit., p.221.

especially if they were French Catholics, because they were seen as heretics and subversives.[201] This is exactly what happens between Madame and Mrs Rusk: the fervent Anglican English housekeeper seems not to trust the governess mostly because she is French, therefore a Catholic.

Another aspect of the governess that underlines Madame's vulgarity, and therefore her foreignness, is Madame's physical aspect, which Maud finds repulsive and disgusting. Madame has “large and rather hollow features”(24) (here the term “hollow” has a double meaning, it is referred to Madame's cheeks but it also means “false”, so it may suggest the woman's real nature). She has “great bands of black hair, too thick and black perhaps to correspond quite naturally with her bleached and sallow skin”(27) and “grim wrinkles traced about her brows and eye-lids”(27). She is also “tall, masculine, a little ghastly”(27). So, her unnaturalness and her 'masculine' violent temperament, help suggest even more her vulgarity. However, in *Uncle Silas* as in *A Lost Name*, the governess' gender ambiguity is a fundamental weapon, because it conveys her the 'male power' she can exercise on Maud. Madame has the role of both the wife and the husband.[202] She is not a simple member of the household, but of the family: she is able to manipulate her employer and she has far more authority on her pupil than the other members of the household.

Madame de la Rougierre is very often associated to the Fantastic, Mythological and Gothic imaginary. In the chapter “A Walk in the Wood”, Maud refers to Madame as if she was the evil wolf of the popular tale “Little Red Riding Hood”, crossing the boundary between beast and human, exactly as her aforementioned androgyny makes her a male in disguise.[203]

> Her great mouth was open, and her eyes absolutely goggled with eagerness. She was devouring all that was passing there. (32)

201 *Ibid.* p.222.
202 *Ibid*. p. 227.
203 J. Walton, *Vision and Vacancy. The Fictions of J.S. Le Fanu*, cit., p.60.

> 'She eats like a wolf, she does, the great rawboned hannimal. I wish you saw her in bed as I did. I put her next the clock-room – she'll hear the hours betimes, I'm thinking. You never saw such a sight. The great long nose and hollow cheeks of her, and oogh! Such a mouth! I felt a'most like little Red Riding-Hood – I did, Miss'. (26)

In other episodes, Maud describes her as a witch. “She skipped with her long, lank legs, like a witch joining a Walpurgis”(42), i.e. the Witches' Sabbath, in which the power of darkness is celebrated[204] and Mrs Rusk calls her “old witch”(97). Moreover, Maud says that Madame's laugh “would not have been a bad laugh for a ghoul”(86) and that going to visit Monica would be “a good excuse for getting rid of Medusa”(99), i.e. Madame. Therefore, her character seems an ambiguous hybrid, an unidentified creature that is neither male nor female, neither human nor beast. Her presence in both Knowl and Bartram contributes to the erosion of every boundary between legitimate and artificial and between good and evil patriarchs.[205]

With Silas, Madame is the most 'spectralized' character of the novel. In the chapter “A Midnight Visitor”, Maud states: “I expected, I think, to see the dreaded figure of the linkman. I was scarcely less frightened to see that of Madame de la Rougierre”(101), so the “midnight visitor” is not the actual spectre, but the governess.

Together with Madam Crowl, the protagonist of Le Fanu's short story “Madam Crowl's Ghost”, Madame de la Rougierre is an exception, because the author usually portrays males as spectres.[206] However, Madame's “spectralization” does not surprise. Maud is extremely afraid of her, because not only does the governess infiltrate in the girl's house and properties, but more dangerously in her mind, threatening her mental health.[207]

204 V. Sage, “Notes”, cit., p.450.
205 J. Walton, *Vision and Vacancy. The Fictions of J.S. Le Fanu*, cit., p.60.
206 *Ibid*. p.27.
207 A. Gaylin, “Ghostly Dispossession: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*”, cit., p.96.

Maud's description of Madame, with her unnatural pale hollow cheeks and her bony hands reminds of an undead creature, like a living skeleton. The '*danse macabre*' performed in a churchyard is the most explicit visual association between the governess and death.[208] Madame calls herself "Madame la Morgue – Mrs Deadhouse" and she says that her 'friends' are "Monsieur Cadavre" and "Monsieur Squelette"(41). Indeed, Maud says that there is something "ghosty" and "devilish"(60) about her; she has a "deathlike"(101) gaze and she looks like "something unearthly"(35). She is a "death-in-life apparition"(27) and just like an evil spectre, she persecutes the heroine haunting her dreams. Her memory is enough to take away Maud's energy and symbolically obscure the sun:

> My energies had returned, my spirit were come again. The sunlight was happy, the flowers innocent, the songs and flutter of the birds once more gay, and all nature delightful and rejoicing.
> After the first elation of relief, now and then a filmy shadow of Madame de la Rougierre would glide across the sunlight, and the remembrance of her menace return with an unexpected pang of fear. (109)

Madame comes back to haunt and terrify Maud also in Bartram-Haugh. She is a *revenante,* a figure resurrected from Maud's past that must be acknowledge and faced, only in this way it can be put to rest.[209]

Doctor Bryerly

Doctor Bryerly is Austin's personal doctor and friend, whom Maud portrays as a mysterious, ambiguous and fearful character. He is continually 'spectralized', because the narrator, Monica and the members of the household are extremely scared of him, indeed "none of [them] quite liked [him] and all a little feared [him]"(129). Therefore, at

208 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.122.
209 A. Gaylin, "Ghostly Dispossession: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.93.

the beginning of the novel readers do not trust him too. Maud wonders who may really be “this bilious, bewigged, black-eyed Doctor Bryerly […] who seemed to rise out of the ground”(129) and Mrs Rusk “was growing more and more afraid of this lean figure sheathed in shining black cloth”(132). Maud sees Doctor Bryerly as an “evil spirit, evoked by a secret incantation”(123), who emerges from darkness:

> The drawing-room was already very dark; but some streaks of this cold light fell upon a black figure, which would otherwise have been unseen, leaning beside the curtains against the window frame.
> It advanced abruptly, with creaking shoes; it was Doctor Bryerly. (169)

The doctor's full name, Hans Emmanuel Bryerly, is quite telling. 'Hans' suggests his German origins and 'Emmanuel' his religious belief: he has probably given himself this name after his conversion to Swedenborgianism.[210] 'Bryerly' is quite telling too: it recalls 'Beyer', the surname of an early Swedenborgian who was tried for heresy by the Swedish Lutheran Church in 1769.[211] The main reason why Maud does not trust the doctor and sees him as an “evil spirit” is in fact his religion.

As already pointed out, the superstitious and Anglican Maud considers Swedenborgianism a dangerous devilish heresy.[212] Even though Bryerly tells her that, beside being a preacher, he has also a “doctor degree”, he is a “Doctor of Medicine”(134) and he kindly explains her in details her late father's conditions, she does not trust his medical opinion, because she cannot overcome her utterly prejudiced impression of him. So, for her he is still “low” both in his religion and social status:[213]

> He was now speaking gently and solemnly; and paused. But another vein of thought he had unconsciously opened in my mind, and I said –

210 V. Sage, “Notes”, cit., pp. 459,466.
211 D.P. Zuber, “Swedenborg and the Disintegration of Language in Sheridan Le Fanu's Sensation Fiction”, in K. Harrison, R. Fantina, *Victorian Sensations. Essays on a Scandalous Genre*, Columbus, The Ohio State University Press, 2006, p.77.
212 V. Sage, “Introduction to *Uncle Silas*”, cit., p.xxx.
213 *Ibid*.

'And had my dear papa no other medical adviser?'
He looked at me sharply, and flushed a little under his dark tint. […] I dare say there was something disparaging in my tone. (135)

However, later in the novel Maud and Monica find out that Bryerly is a good man. He seems to care about Austin's daughter and to be concerned with her well-being, indeed during her ordeal at Bartram-Haugh he is a kind of "Guardian Angel" for her.[214] From the very beginning, he does not trust Silas and does not want Maud to live with him. He fearlessly reveals Silas' thieving and explains Maud how her uncle is defrauding her. Moreover, he is ready to do anything to safeguard Maud's welfare: "If you think of any way in which I can be of the least service, Miss, I'm ready to act, that's all; mind, *any* way"(317). And when he leaves Bartram, Maud realises to have lost "a true friend"(317).

Monica Knollys

Another character who cares about Maud is her cousin Monica. She is a resolute woman, has a "good firm figure, with something kindly in her look"(47), she is "energetic, bright, saucy"(47), and outspoken. Moreover, she dresses "handsomely in purple satin, with a good deal of lace"(47), and this fancy way of dressing reveals her social status: she is a respected member of the upper class society.[215]

Monica is a key figure for Maud, because she always tries to protect and safeguard her and, at the end of the novel, she becomes her ward. Monica would like Austin to marry a "cleaver woman"(71) for Maud's sake; a woman who would "prevent mischief"(71) and protect the girl. However, the man decides to hire Madame de la Rougierre as Maud's governess and to appoint Silas as her ward, something that Monica sharply criticises: "I'm vexed with Austin […] I can't conceive anything so entirely

214 *Ibid.*
215 T. Mangum, "Sheridan Le Fanu's Ungovernable Governesses", cit., p.225.

preposterous, and dangerous and insane as his conduct"(80). Monica always warns Maud against Madame de la Rougierre and Silas, therefore the woman's cautions and fears contribute heavily to Maud's 'spectralization' of her uncle.[216]

Monica's opinion on religion is interesting because it is ambiguous. She does not seem to be a fervent believer:

> I'd much rather have no religion, and enjoy life while I'm in it, than choose one to worry me here and bedevil me hereafter. But some people, my dear, have a taste for being miserable. (50)

Yet, she enhances Maud's fear of her father's religion:

> 'Papa is a Swedenborgian, I believe.'
> 'Yes, yes – I forgot the horrid name – a Swedenborgian, that is it. I don't know exactly what they think, but every one knows they are a sort of pagans, my dear. He's not making one of *you*, dear – is he?'
> 'I go to church every Sunday.'
> 'Well, that's mercy; Swedenborgian is such an ugly name; and besides they are all likely to be damned, my dear, and that's a serious consideration. (50)

So, she seems to contradict herself. On the one hand, she considers religion a kind of burden, but on the other hand, she behaves very superstitiously and with the intransigence of the high-church orthodoxy.[217]

216 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.126.
217 V. Sage, "Notes", cit., p.451.

2.5. *Uncle Silas*' Topics

2.5.1. The Anglo-Irish Question

As the word itself suggests, the term 'Anglo-Irish' is usually used to define a group of Irish people who come from England or have English origins and are mostly Protestants. They belong to that social and political British caste who ruled over Ireland in the past and are known as the “Protestant Ascendancy”.

Because of their political power in Ireland, they claimed to have an aristocratic origin and they sanctioned a political and cultural Anglo-Irish tradition in Ireland. This tradition legitimated and reinforced the community's power, but it was also characterised by instability, uncertainty, and fragmentation.[218]

The Anglo-Irish community was neither fully British nor totally allied to their Irish Catholic compatriots.[219] Therefore, it was a 'hyphened' community with a split identity. Many were attached to their English connection, some felt strongly Irish and others hesitated between the two, adopting, according to the context, either one or the other.

This identity crisis has an historical background. Anglo-Irish were never well-accepted by the Irish Catholic 'natives', who saw the Anglicans as “a gang of interlopers” and as “invading aliens”. This hostility and the sense of being surrounded by 'enemies' was strongly perceived by the Anglo-Irish, so these people were almost afraid to call themselves 'Anglicans'. But they were reluctant to define themselves 'Irish' too. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, they were influenced by a popular British stereotype, according to which Irish people were “degenerate savages”. However, over the course of the eighteenth century they realised they were as Irish as their Catholic

218 M. Howes, “Misalliance and Anglo-Irish Tradition in Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*”, cit., p.165.
219 A. Gaylin, “Ghostly Dispossessions: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*”, cit., p.102.

compatriots, so they began to define themselves 'Irish' with proud and enthusiasm.

The acceptance of the Irish identity in the community was accomplished more or less by the 1760s. Anglo-Irish claimed to have a peculiar sense of 'Irishness', that was exclusively Anglican and, for this reason, they felt superior and not contaminated by the Irish 'barbarism'. They considered themselves "chosen people" a belief, which was enhanced also by public declarations, like Sir Richard Cox' statement, according to which Ireland was "sharply divided into civilised Anglicans and barbaric Catholics". Therefore, the Anglo-Irish were isolated from the others and developed a strong sense of togetherness, which was highlighted by public feasts that the community celebrated.[220] Of course, this sense of superiority and belonging enhanced the already existing resentment of the Irish Catholics towards them.

In the nineteenth century, the Anglo-Irish community's acceptance was undermined by a series of British laws that tried to control and limit the Irish culture and the Catholic emancipation. In Ireland, the British government established National schools, where students were not allowed to speak Irish and were only taught English language, literature and culture. The aim was to instil in them the English lifestyle, to make them 'civilised' citizens and completely eradicate their Irish 'barbarism'. [221]

During the Enlightenment, a definite contrast between England and Ireland was marked. The latter, like all the other zones of the 'Celtic fringe', including the Scottish Highlands and Wales were considered atavistic zones, populated by uncultivated monsters. These places were directly opposed to the rational, civilized and progressive England.[222] This idea was very widespread in England and influenced popular culture. In *Uncle Silas*, Maud mentions a satirical magazine called *Punch*, which was very famous in the Mid-Victorian period (1851-1875) and portrayed Irish peasants as apes.[223]

The Anglo-Irish' main anxiety was therefore "racial assimilation". They feared it may

220 J. Killeen, *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction*. *History, Origins, Theories*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2014, pp.35,37-39,45.
221 M. Howes, "Misalliance and Anglo-Irish Tradition in Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.169.
222 J. Killeen, *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction*. *History, Origins, Theories*, cit., p.3.
223 V. Sage, "Notes", cit., p.455.

have contaminated England's purity. However, in Ireland such preoccupation did not only express the typical colonial fear of 'going native', but it made the Anglo-Irish sadly aware of a great change in their relationship with the Catholics. In the nineteenth century, the Protestant Ascendancy's power and wealth diminished dramatically.[224] After the 1826 election of Daniel O'Connell, an Irish Catholic politician who fought for the Irish emancipation and independence, the Anglo-Irish establishment feared a definite defeat of Protestantism and politicians started to weight up their chances in a civil war. Between 1830 and 1836 popular turmoil actually started, giving way to the Tithe War, a campaign of non-violent civil disobedience, in which Irish Catholics, who were more taxed than the Anglo-Irish, refused to pay their levies.[225]

In the 1840s, the emancipation of Catholics and Dissenters threatened the Anglican Protestant establishment from within. Some members were said to wink at the Tractarians: High Church Anglicans with Roman Catholic sympathies. Politically, this decade was characterised by the Chartist Movement protests and by the Famine, which affected Ireland in the run-up to 1848, when the patriotic movement of the Young Ireland rose up.[226]

It is not surprising that most of Anglo-Irish authors wrote Gothic fiction. Victor Turner states that this liminal threatening period was traumatic for the Anglicans and when a trauma is experienced, it continually returns to the mind through symbols. Gothic literature is therefore up to the task. Gothic is a liminal genre, obsessed with moments of fracture and psychological fragility, which are enacted over and over again in an attempt to overcome them. Gothic literature's language of paranoia, of the unreal and the inexplicable is a way in which many Anglo-Irish authors can express themselves, because Gothic makes their 'political' unconscious emerge. For this reason, Roy Foster emphasises the importance of “Protestant insecurity and self-interrogation” to the development of Gothic in Ireland, while Jarlath Killeen states that the Gothic is

224 M. Howes, “Misalliance and Anglo-Irish Tradition in Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*”, cit., p.170.
225 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., pp.26,38.
226 V. Sage, “Introduction to *Uncle Silas*”, cit., p.xxv.

“essentially a Protestant genre” and that “Protestantism is a necessary precondition for Irish Gothic”.

According to Killeen, the origin of Irish Gothic can be located at the half of the eighteenth century, when horror and terror were widely used in historical texts. However, Proto-Gothic literature already flourished at the time of the Penal Laws (1695), when Anglican power was consolidated at the expense of Irish freedom. Despite their power in society, a great fear of annihilation is to be found in this period. For example, in the writings of some of the most important men in Ireland such as Archbishop William King, who constantly sees Catholic ghosts and monsters hiding in darkness. This vision of Catholics as a degenerate outsider group in opposition to the virtuous Anglican community is common in Irish Gothic.

The first works that belong to this literary genre were published only at the end of the 1750s, when the Irish Catholic middle class managed to abrogate the Penal Laws and power in Ireland was equally re-distributed. In the nineteenth century, Irish Gothic reached its peak with the Gothic novel, which is considered to be one of the main forms of Irish writing still nowadays. Many Irish Gothic novels have become famous literary works, like Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, the aforementioned *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and, of course, Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*.[227]

In Gothic novels, especially in those written for the English market, Ireland is usually depicted as a wild, exotic and odd place, governed by supernatural and demonic forces. However, such association is far older than novels. The ancient Greek geographer Strabo said that the island was inhabited by cannibals, who devoured their deceased fathers, and Giraldus Cambrensis wrote that Irish people were vicious zoophiles.

Quite ironically, it was an Irish political theorist who mostly reinforce this stereotype. In 1757, Edmund Burke wrote his important treaty *A Philosophical Enquiry into the*

227 J. Killeen, *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction. History, Origins, Theories*, cit., pp.11,34,36,42,49,51,64,70.

Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful, connecting the Sublime to darkness, danger, wilderness and to a primitive past[228] when druids "performed all their ceremonies in the bosom of the darkest woods, and in the shades of the oldest and most spreading oaks".[229] He certainly did not mean to discredit Ireland, indeed the Sublime is for Burke the 'mirror' of God. However, with these words he directly connects Ireland with darkness and 'uncanniness'. This prejudice survived also in the XX century. In his almost unknown first film *Dementia 13*, the famous director Francis Ford Coppola portrays Irish locations as creepy, frightening places.

So, as stated before, Irish Gothic is grounded on the Anglo-Irish stereotyped vision of Ireland, their anti-Catholicism, their identity fragmentation and their constant fear of losing the political hegemony in society. However, Irish Gothic is more than this. There are two different ways in which this genre develops; a 'conservative tendency', which nostalgically longs for the existential, social and religious security of the past and a 'progressive tendency' that aims to move away from castles and Catholic superstitions and wants to depict the contemporary world in which authors live.[230]

One of the most important Anglo-Irish Gothic authors, who belongs to the latter group, is indeed Sheridan Le Fanu, who according to Roy Foster, was the pioneer of the nineteenth-century Irish supernatural fiction.[231]

In chapter I, it was pointed out that *Uncle Silas*' author came from a Protestant family with Huguenot origins, as a child, he spent eleven years of his life at a military school in Phoenix Park, and in Abington, his family became the target of popular hate during the Tithe Wars. In that period the author's family's fortune and reputation declined dramatically. Moreover, as stated before, Le Fanu's literary career depended on his English publisher, therefore his living was determined by the English literary market, so he could not be free to fully express himself. Because of all these events, the author

228 *Ibid*. pp. 3,6,7.
229 E. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Mineola (NY), Dover Publications Inc., 2008, p.41.
230 J. Killeen, *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction*. *History, Origins, Theories*, cit., pp. 1,7,71.
231 *Ibid*. p.34.

became aware of the fragility of the Anglo-Irish' political and social position.

Le Fanu is the only renowned writer involved in Dublin's politics. He was a committed conservative and during his political career, which swung between practical cooperation with the Young Ireland and an unsuccessful attempt to join Tories, he did everything he could to preserve the Anglo-Irish position as a distinct and superior caste.[232]

In the 1830s, Le Fanu joined a Tory group called The Irish Metropolitan Conservative Society. In that period he expressed all his anger and frustration against Daniel O'Connell's government. He stated that the tensions between Protestants and Catholics were increasing and the British government was doing nothing to protect the Anglo-Irish community's interests, instead it was selling them to their "inveterate enemies" and to a "Popish leader".[233] Of course, such harsh words and anti-Catholic sentiment find another explanation in Le Fanu's Huguenot origins. In the Wars of Religion (1562-1598), his forefathers suffered under the persecutions of the French Catholics, who exiled them from France and stole their properties.[234]

So, how does a novel like *Uncle Silas* fit into all this?

Fears about the fate of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy always haunted Le Fanu. Such worries are already visible in *Uncle Silas*' precursor "A Passage in the Secret History of an Irish Countess", where the heroine eventually does not manage to preserve her 'sacred' heritage and lives a sorrowful life. This tale was published in Ireland, therefore it openly talks about this Country's politics, while *Uncle Silas* was released in England and readers in the UK did not like to read about Irish politics, so in the novel such themes are hidden and embedded in the text. *Uncle Silas*, which is set in England and has English characters, deals with the Anglo-Irish condition between the lines. The

232 M. Howes, "Misalliance and Anglo-Irish Tradition in Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*", cit., pp.166,167.
233 K. Ogawa, "Strangers Within Our Gates in Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*" in *Journal of Irish Studies 2007, vol.22*, Hiroshima, Iasil Japan, 2007, pp. 18,19.
234 A. Gaylin, "Ghostly Dispossessions: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.103.

novel's preoccupations with dynastic families and their power, the overcome of the binary opposition between pure and corrupt,[235] the continuous hesitation and lack of a real difference between living and dead, friends and enemies[236] are characteristics that make this text an Anglo-Irish Gothic novel.

According to Elizabeth Bowen, Le Fanu's novel is an Irish story set in an English location:[237]*Uncle Silas* is 'displaced'. Derbyshire actually stands for County Cork, the place where the novel's prototype is set[238] and the isolation of the Ascendancy country house is one of the most evident marks of the story's Anglo-Irish character. Knowl and Bartram-Haugh are in open countryside, surrounded by small villages but isolated. This represents the Anglo-Irish' condition of dependence on an absent centre of power and the alienation from the local government.[239] Moreover, these mansions symbolise the Anglo-Irish' uncanny feeling of being out of place in their own Country. Maud should feel safe at Knowl or Bartram, instead these places are unfamiliar,[240] haunted, eerie, and dangerous for her.

So, the family tradition, power and the dynastic continuity, symbolised by the Big House, are portrayed as fragmented and corrupted. In the novel, Austin is the patriarch and representative of the Ascendancy's tradition. He does everything he can to secure the family's power and stability. Maud depicts him as an idealised landlord, who is neighbourly and popular, social and charitable. This description, however, contrasts sharply with the usual Anglo-Irish depiction as scorned and isolated people. Indeed, Austin's idealisation soon leaves room to reality. Austin's power is never tangible. He is always secluded in his house and, even if he sends money and writes letters to the local community, he is always physically absent in his neighbourhood. So, he is actually an "irresponsible absentee", and like the Anglo-Irish hegemony, which lacks a real centre of power in Ireland, Austin's authority is never concrete and determinant.

235 M. Howes, "Misalliance and Anglo-Irish Tradition in Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*", cit., pp.168,175,185.
236 J. Killeen, *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction. History, Origins, Theories*, cit., p.46.
237 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.141.
238 A. Gaylin, "Ghostly Dispossessions: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.102.
239 M. Howes, "Misalliance and Anglo-Irish Tradition in Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*", cit., pp.178,179.
240 A. Gaylin, "Ghostly Dispossessions: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.102.

2.5.1.1. Big House Gothics

The novel belongs to the Anglo-Irish tradition of the 'Big House Gothics'. This term delineates a literary tradition, from Maria Edgeworth to Yeats, in which Anglo-Irish are not portrayed as people who merely suffer from the British government's indifference or Irish hate, but they are victims of their own vices. Indeed, Anglo-Irish were usually criticised for their own provincialism, greediness and irresponsible behaviour and it was generally thought that the Anglo-Irish aristocracy's decline was due to their weakness. This is exactly what happens to the Ruthyns. It is impossible not to associate such description with Silas, another member of the Ascendancy who, unlike Austin, does not care about the family bloodline. He is greedy, vicious, dissolute and the symbol of "sexual corruption". In his youth, he married a lower-class Celt, threatening in this way the 'purity' of the Ascendancy and contaminating the 'pure' Anglo-Irish blood. The brothers' opposite attitude is a "twin manifestation" of a 'schizophrenic' Anglo-Irish tradition, which is distinguished by its contemporaneous empowering and enfeebling.[241]

It is clear that Le Fanu does not like hybridity and does not believe neither in the peaceful cohabitation of different groups of people[242] nor in the "fairy tale", according to which conflicts are solved out with marriage,[243] because in the novel the vehicle through which the Ascendancy's corruption is perpetuated is Silas' intermarriage. Such degeneration is embodied by Dudley Ruthyn, who symbolises the greatest Anglo-Irish fear that the well-bred and educated members of the Ascendancy may become debauched barbarians and whose brutal and barbaric behaviour represents that element of corruption Silas introduced in the family. A degradation which does not 'infect' only one member, but is handed down from parents to children; Dudley marries another lower-class girl and therefore this corruption goes on.

241 M. Howes, "Misalliance and Anglo-Irish Tradition in Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*", cit., pp.174,176,177.
242 K. Ogawa, "Strangers Within Our Gates in Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.22.
243 A. Gaylin, "Ghostly Dispossessions: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.104.

2.5.1

Given the period's tendency to associate the union between Anglicans and Irish to a romance and Celtic Ireland to feminine nature, gender and sexuality inevitably play a great role in the Anglo-Irish writing about the Ascendancy's cultural and social crisis.

Like in Matthew Arnold's important treaty on English and Irish assimilation *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, also in *Uncle Silas* Celticism, femininity and nervous disorders are put together. Maud, the female (therefore Celtic) heir should safeguard and preserve the Ascendancy's tradition but she is inadequate. From the very first page she is ignorant about the "family lore", she cannot understand the nature of the sacrifice Austin asks her to make. Moreover, the family tradition is oppressive to her eyes, because she feels threatened by its mysterious content.

One of the reasons why she is unfit to this task is her gender.[244] Austin states that it is a "pity she's a girl and so young"(14), believing that women tend to be nervous and anxious, so they get scared very easily, therefore they are unreliable.

As said before, Maud's psyche is fragile; she is always agitated and sometimes she is actually hysterical. The heroine herself is aware of this and defines herself 'nervous' in an almost obsessive way. Maud's weakness, emotional instability, lack of trust in herself symbolise once again the Anglo-Irish' condition of alienation, political fragility, and power vacancy. In addition, this self-accusatory narration suits perfectly the aforementioned tradition of the "Big House Gothics". Maud is therefore a destabilising element and symbolises both the English civilization, which is represented by her bloodline, her decision to marry the English Ilbury and not to succumb to the corrupted Dudley, and the female 'Irishness'.

So, in the novel, the Celtic female character is a dangerous, barbaric and potentially disruptive element. This is the case of the rustic manners of Milly, whom Maud tries to educate in order to eliminate the girl's "barbarism". Such attitude and language clearly

244 M. Howes, "Misalliance and Anglo-Irish Tradition in Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*", cit., pp. 170,175,180.

remind to the nineteenth century imperial discourses about the cultural differences between the wild, barbaric Irish and the civilized English and the latter's mission to educate the former. Indeed, according to Le Fanu, a girl's cultivation has a fundamental role and the educators need to be chosen carefully. An uncivilised education imparted by a corrupted Continental figure, like Madame de la Rougierre, can corrupt the Ascendancy.[245]

2.5.2. Women and Workers' Mistreatment

As mentioned before, women played an important role in Le Fanu's life. He was very closed and helpful to them. For example, he aided his niece Rhoda Broughton to publish and serialize her novels.[246]

Despite the aforementioned link between female characters, disruptive danger and 'barbarism', women are the focus of much of Le Fanu's fiction.[247] His "unconscious feminism"[248] allows him to analyse the feminine mind and issues in a delicate way, including sensitive questions like female relationships and lesbianism, which are wonderfully analysed in "Carmilla", through the innocent Laura's eyes.[249]

Female characters are realistic, multifaceted and they are the protagonists of many of the author's works; Maud Ruthyn in *Uncle Silas*, Ethel Ware in *Willing to Die*, Laura Gray in "Carmilla", Rachel Lake in *Wylder's Hand*,[250] and many more.

While male characters are often haunted by guilt and they are portrayed at the same time as victims and villains,[251] women are generally positive figures for Le Fanu, indeed

245 *Ibid*. pp. 180,181,183.
246 A. Milbank, "Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu: Gothic Grotesque and the Huguenot Inheritance", cit., p.370.
247 W.J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1993, p.63.
248 *Ibid.* p.64.
249 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.6.
250 M.H. Begnal, *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, cit., p.72.
251 A. Milbank, "Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu: Gothic Grotesque and the Huguenot Inheritance", cit., p.370.

in *Wylder's Hand* female beauty is said to be “the image of God”.[252] However, they are also tormented figures, with a great inward-looking ability, which makes them reflect on their lives and existence. A capacity that is usually lacking in the author's male characters. An example of this may be the adult Maud's ability to analyse her past self and her emotions. Such narration contributes to the novel's richness.[253] Because of their ability to deeply analyse reality, Le Fanu's women are “tragic figures”; they are aware to be disadvantaged and to live in an unequal society, but they cannot change this situation. They can only keep on doing all those meaningless actions society requires them to do.[254]

Some of Le Fanu's works actually denounce women's inferior position in society and their mistreatment. One of his early ghost stories “Schalken the Painter” (1839), which belongs to the *Purcell Papers*, deals with female exploitation and criticises male power over women. This tale begins with the description of one of Schalken's paintings, which portrays a female figure with a lamp. She is Rose Velderkaust (her surname means 'of price'), who is the niece of the painter's art master and is sold to a mysterious man. The heroine manages to flee back to her uncle's house but, despite her plea not to be left alone and to be protected from her persecutor, the uncle abandons her. Eventually, she disappears into a canal. Years later, in the shape of a ghost, she manages to find her lover again and she tells him the truth of the sad conditions in which she lived. So, in this tale, Le Fanu denounces women's dehumanisation, neglect and the patriarchal tyranny over them, which is so dangerous to be fatal.

In his novel *Wylder's Hand* (1864), the two cousins Rachel Lake and Dorcas Brandon would like to live an independent life together. They compare themselves to the Ladies of Llangollen; two Irish ladies, who lived between the eighteenth and nineteenth century. They had to leave their Country because their sentimental relationship was not

252 W.J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, cit., p.63.
253 V. Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic. The Rhetoric of Darkness*, cit., p.6.
254 M.H. Begnal, *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, cit., p.72.

accepted by their families. However, unlike them, the two cousins do not manage to live freely. Rachel and Dorcas' loyalty to their husbands and brothers prevent their escape and embroils in a tragic plot of murders.[255]

Uncle Silas was published in the same year as *Wylder's Hand*. As said before, Le Fanu initially entitled it *Maud Ruthyn*, to stress the importance of the female character and her point of view, but his editor Bentley did not like this title and Le Fanu had to change it. The title that was initially chosen by the author, highlights the 'feminist' aspect of the novel[256] and Le Fanu's will to denounce once again women's mistreatment and male tyranny over them. Like Rachel and Dorcas, Maud is very tied and loyal to the family's patriarchs. However, the male authorities take advantage of her blind trust to manipulate her for their own aims. Austin 'uses' her to restore the family's lost reputation and delivers her into the hands of the evil and tyrannical Silas. The uncle secludes Maud and his daughter Milly from the outside world,[257] entraps and tries to kill his niece in order to to use Maud's inheritance to become rich and pay his game debts.

Maud's trust in Austin and Silas does not allow her to understand she is in danger. She doubts many times her own judgement, but she never questions her father and her uncle's decisions. This is because the heroine seems to have introjected the male rhetoric, according to which women are “frightened and unreliable”. Maud is indeed very critical of her own sex.[258] According to her, women's temperament is characterised by an “ineradicable jealousy”(69). Moreover, women are too irrational, therefore they are impartial judges and “man's estimate of woman is higher than woman's own”. (33) Like the novel's male figures, she sees her femininity as a dangerous set of sexual weaknesses and unstablenesses that must be controlled. Maud eventually masters her 'dangerous' femininity. She manages to defeat her hysterical tendencies, she escapes

255 A. Milbank, “Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu: Gothic Grotesque and the Huguenot Inheritance”, cit., pp.370,371.
256 W.J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, cit., p.66.
257 A. Milbank, “Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu: Gothic Grotesque and the Huguenot Inheritance”, cit., p.372.
258 M. Howes, “Misalliance and Anglo-Irish Tradition in Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*”, cit., p.181.

from Bartram-Haugh, the reign of decay and dissolution, and from the “sexual dangers”, i.e. Dudley and Capitan Oakley. At the end, she marries the respectable Lord Ilbury”.[259]

In *Uncle Silas* women's mistreatment is highlighted by some explicit scenes of violence against female characters. Beyond Madame de la Rougierre's aggressive temperament towards Maud, in the first part of the novel the girl is harassed by a group of men:

> Madame was holding my arm, but I snatched it from her, and would have run; the tall man, however, placed his arms round me and held me fast with an affectation of playfulness, but his grip was hard enough to hurt me a good deal. Being now thoroughly frightened, after an ineffectual struggle […] I began to scream, shriek after shriek, which the man attempted to drown with loud hooting, peals of laughter, forcing his handkerchief against my mouth, while Madame continued to bawl her exhortations to 'be quaite' in my ear. (95)

However, two minor characters are treated even more violently. One of them is Meg Hawkes, the miller's daughter, whom Milly nicknames 'Beauty'. They live near Bartram-Haugh, because Meg's father works for Silas and the girl is often furiously beaten by her father:

> As we [Maud and Milly] returned, in passing a clump of trees, we heard a sudden outbreak of voices, angry and expostulatory; and saw, under the trees, the savage old Zamiel [the miller] strike his daughter with his stick two great blows, one of which across the head. 'Beauty' ran only a short distance away, while the swart old wood-demon stumped lustily after her, cursing and brandishing his cudgel. […] Two little rivulets of blood were tickling over her temple.
> 'I say, fayther, look at that' she said, with a strange tremulous smile, lifting her hand, which was smeared with blood.
> Perhaps he was ashamed, and the more enraged on that account, for he growled another curse, and started afresh to reach her, whirling his stick in the air. Our voices, however, arrested him. (235,236)

259 *Ibid*. pp.182,184.

When Maud reports this to her uncle and asks him to take measures against the miller, he shockingly does not condemn this brutal violence and he even states that Hawkes “is a useful servant”, “a very kind father, and a most honest man”. (240) Silas does not seem to reject violence, which he considers only as a harsh form of education. Indeed when he was young, he treated his wife violently and the same does his son Dudley.

The other abused minor character is Sarah Matilda, Dudley's wife. Silas' son is very angry at her because she has told his father they are married, so Silas has disinherited him:

> 'Oh! Dudley, dear, *what* have I done – what have I done – ye hate me so?'
> 'What a' ye done? Ye vicious little beast, ye! You've got us turned out an' disinherited' […]
> I could only hear her sobs and shrill tones in reply, for they were descending the stairs; and Mary Quince reported to me, in a horrified sort of way, that she saw him bundle her into the fly at the door, like a truss of hay into a hay-loft. And he stood with his head in at the window, scolding her, till it drove away.
> 'I knew he wor jawing her, poor thing! By the way be kep' waggin' his head – an' he had his fist inside, a shakin' in her face. (350)

After witnessing this violent scene, Mary Quince sadly concludes that:

> 'Tis well for me I never was married. And see how we all would like to get husbands for all that, though so few is happy together. 'Tis a queer world, and them that's single is maybe the best off after all'. (350)

In the novel, there is only one female abusive character: Madame de la Rougierre. Of course, she is a wicked character and a dangerous villain who harms the young narrator, but she is also Silas' employee and is obliged to do everything he asks. Tormenting Maud is one of her tasks. So, Silas has a great authority over her and over the other women of the household, whom he uses and exploits.

At the end of the novel, Madame tells Maud that she does not hate her and she is willing to free her and take her to Monica. At this point, readers expect that the two

would join their forces and rebel against the male authority, but Maud stubbornly still trusts her uncle:

> 'You theenk I hate you. You are quaite wrong, my dear Maud. I am, on the contrary
> very much interested for you – I am, I assure you, dear a cheaile.'
> And she laid her great hand, with joints misshapen by old chilblains, upon the back of mine. I looked up in her face. She was not smiling. On the contrary, her wide mouth was drawn down at the corners ruefully […]
> 'Suppose I should bring you to Lady Knollys, and place you in her charge, what would a you do then for poor Madame?' […]
> 'Do you mean to imply, Madame, that my guardian is not to be trusted, and I ought to make my escape from him, and that you are really willing to aid me in doing so?' […]
> 'And so, you cleaver cheaile, we two sit here, playing at a game of chess, over this little table, to decide which shall destroy the other – is it not so?'
> 'I will not allow you to destroy me', I retorted, with a sudden flash. […]
> 'You are very malicious ma chère; or, it may be, only very stupid.' (411,412)

Even if Maud and Madame are both oppressed by Silas' authority, they cannot cooperate because their "institutional antagonism" prevents it.[260] They belong to two different social ranks and in a class-based society, persons of different classes cannot cooperate.

The novel seems also to provide a reflection on the workers' conditions. These characters are not treated violently, but they are always scorned. In addition, their employers are almost disgusted by the fact that they belong to a lower class. This attitude was quite typical in the nineteenth century. Talking about her personal experience as a governess, Charlotte Brontë stated that "a private governess has no existence, is not considered as a living and rational being except as connected with the wearisome duties she has to fulfil".[261]

260 T. Mangum, "Sheridan Le Fanu's Ungovernable Governesses", cit., pp.231,232.
261 C. Brontë in a letter to E. Brontë of 8th June 1839, quoted in T. Mangum, "Sheridan Le Fanu's Ungovernable Governesses", cit., p.215.

When Maud tells Silas about Meg Hawkes' mistreatment, her uncle says that working class people are accustomed to violence:

> 'You see, my dear child, they are rough persons; their ideas are not ours; their young
> people must be chastised, and in a way and to a degree that we would look upon in serious light. I've found it a bad plan interfering in strictly domestic misunderstandings, and should rather not.' […]
> 'Why, you romantic little child, people in that rank of life think absolutely nothing of a broken head', answered Uncle Silas. (239)

Maud is haughty towards servants too.[262] Even if she wants to help Meg, she treats the girl and her father as inferiors and in her narration, she almost dehumanises them:

> 'I hesitated to go near her [Meg], these Hawkeses, Beauty and Pegtop, were such savages. So I rolled the apples gently along the ground to her feet. She continued to look doggedly at us […] and kicked away the apples sullenly that approached her feet. […]
> 'Poor thing! I'm afraid she leads a hard life. What strange, repulsive people they are!' (237)

Servants are 'ghostly' hands at work; they are invisible, alienated subjects, who do not fully own their body.[263] In the novel, Milly gives them nicknames, which they are forced to accept. Indeed they are always called by these nicknames, whereas their real names are forgotten and hidden behind the 'new' identity their high-rank employer gives them. For example, Lucy Wyat becomes 'Lucia de l'Amour', a reference to Donizetti's opera *Lucia di Lammermoor.*[264]

When Maud comes to Bartram and meets Milly for the first time, none of the servants are allowed to speak for him/herself:

262 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.158.
263 A. Gaylin, "Ghostly Dispossessions: the Gothic Properties of *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.97.
264 V. Sage, "Notes", cit., p.462.

'And what's *her* name?' she demanded, nodding to Mary Quince. […]
Mary courtesied, and I answered. […]
'You're welcome, Quince. What shall I call her? I've a name for all o'them. Old Giles there, is Giblets. He did not like it first, but he answers quick enough now; and Old Lucy Wyat there', nodding toward the old woman, 'is Lucia de l'Amour.' […] 'I call her l'Amour for shortness;' and she laughed hilariously, and I could not forbear joining; and, winking at me, she called aloud, 'l'Amour.' (197)

Even if the working class members are neglected and treated as inferiors, their role is fundamental in the plot and, at a certain extent, they can be considered the 'heroes' of the story. At the end of the novel, when Maud is imprisoned by Silas in a remote area of Bartram, Madame drinks the drugged wine that was meant for the girl, dismantling her master's plan and saving his niece's life. Meg, who unlike Maud is resourceful and strong,[265] makes a plan with her fiancé Tom Brice to help the young heroine escape from Silas' mansion.

2.5.3. Addiction and Self-Destruction

Employers and employees, masters and servants may be divided into different social classes, may be more or less privileged but neither of them is spared by sorrow and folly.[266]

According to H.H. Kane, a nineteenth-century doctor from New York, the modern industrialised society, its hectic pace, the stressful and hard work caused a “lessened physical labour and increased mental work”, which lead to a dramatic increase in the number of suicides, insanity and “nervous temperament[s]”, such as hysteria. Consequentially, the XIX century saw the enhancement of drug use. Both stimulants and narcotics were used by doctors to cure these mental diseases. But they were also widely widespread in society, beyond the medical field, and were taken by every kind of people,

265 M.H. Begnal, *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, cit., p.59.
266 W.J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, cit., p.147.

of every Country, gender, and social class. They mainly used them to relieve mental exhaustion and despondency.[267] This seems to debunk the common idea, according to which "those who are commonplace and those who are stupid have no affinity for drug[s]".[268]

However, a peculiar association between drugs and artists cannot be denied. These substances were also used to "amplify mental capacities via artificial means", therefore it was a common practice between intellectuals, occultists and authors. Indeed members of the intellectual elite frequently figured in the abuse statistics. Authors like John Keats, Percy Shelley, George Byron, Sir Walter Scott, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Charles Dickens, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Edgar Allan Poe, Thèophile Gautier, Wilkie Collins, Oscar Wilde and Aleister Crowley used them and they also stated that their works were partly inspired by their drug-induced visions. Charles Baudelaire and Thomas De Quincey wrote essays about their experiences with psychoactive substances. In 1851 the French poet published his famous and brilliant work "The Artificial Paradises", and before him, in 1821 the English author realised his masterpiece *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, which was also cited by Cesare Lombroso when he talks about the relationship between drug abuse and mentally gifted people.

Beyond literary inspiration, these substances were taken for 'metaphysical' purposes. The drug use in occult sects like Swedenborgians, Rosicrucians and others was very widespread, because in this way they allegedly could overcome the barriers of human rational mind to connect to the spiritual world.[269] Indeed in *Uncle Silas*, Maud's Swedenborgian uncle uses opium for this reason. In the *Varieties of Religious Experience*, the American psychologist William James, brother of Henry James,

267 H.H. Kane, *Drugs that Enslave. The Opium, Morphine, Chloral and Hashisch Habit,* Philadelphia, Presley Blakiston, 1881, pp.17-19.
268 B.M.Hammack, "Phantastica: The Chemically Inspired Intellectual in Occult Fiction", in *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal Vol.37, No.1 March 2004,* University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada, 2004, p.87.
269 *Ibid*. pp.84,88,97.

describes his use of nitrous oxide as a mystical experience and as an "anaesthetic revelation".[270]

These chemically inspired authors who sought to reach an outer, occult world and the Romantic, tormented opium-eaters are very fascinating figures today. However, in Le Fanu's time, they were seen as degenerates. Drug-users were generally cast as supernatural beings, revenants, "vampire-like living dead", fiends and ghosts. They were often sketched as tormented spirits in popular magazines and even scientific periodicals like *The Journal of Mental Science* or the *The Edinburgh Medical Journal* connected them to the occult. Indeed, in his article on hashish, Doctor Bell states that drug-taking is a kind of demonic possession.[271]

The psychoactive substance that was mostly used (and abused) in the XIX century was definitely opium. It was part of daily life in Britain and it was the main ingredient of several popular folk remedies. Many opiate medicines, like the Godfrey's Cordial or the Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup were sold everywhere, without a medical prescription. In the UK, people could buy opium in pills, powders, lozenges, syrups, poultices, liniments and laudanum, i.e. a blend of opium and alcohol. Of course, it was mostly used as a painkiller, since it eases many common physical and mental diseases, like bronchitis, menstrual symptoms, sleeplessness, depression, pneumonia, sciatica and so on.[272] But, because of its cheapness, opium was also widely used as a recreational drug. It costed less than gin, so many working class people used it after exhausting working days.[273]

Despite its unregulated sale, doctors and scientists were well-aware that opium is very addictive and they had a clear idea of what addiction is. Doctor Kane stated that "everything must give way to this vice. Business is neglected […] hope, ambition, happiness, self-respect are meaningless words; the one thing that fills their mind is the

270 W. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, London, Routledge, 2002, cit., p.303.
271 B.M.Hammack, "Phantastica: The Chemically Inspired Intellectual in Occult Fiction", cit., pp.89,95.
272 B. Milligan, "Opium in the Nineteenth Century", Appendix to T. De Quincey, *Confessions of An English Opium-Eater,* London, Penguin Classics, 2003, p.247.
273 B. Milligan, "Introduction to *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*", in T. De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, p.xxxiii.

gratification of this passion, which they loathe, but from which they cannot break".[274]

As early as 1700, phenomena which nowadays are known as withdrawal syndrome and tolerance were reported in a few specialised treaties. However, at that time, no one was really aware that such conditions were the symptoms of opium-addiction. As said before, this drug was very easily available, so people seldom halted its use, therefore withdrawal syndrome did not show. And if opium administration was interrupted, the withdrawal symptoms were thought to be caused by the illness opium was meant to cure. Moreover, self-medication with opium was a way of avoiding the costs of a professional medical consult, so doctors had few opportunities to observe and study the habit's formation and its stages. In addition, the sale of this substance was a very profitable business. So, no one really wanted to regulate the opium sale, therefore opium-addiction became epidemic.

Opium sales were first restrained with the 1868 Pharmacy Act, according to which only licensed pharmacists and chemists could sale it. Indeed after the mid-century, doctors began to formulate modern ideas of addiction. With the rise of the hypodermic morphine injection, the withdrawal symptoms were much more visible and the social problem of addiction worsened.

Morphine is opium's main alkaloid. It was first isolated in 1803 and it started to be used as a medicine only in the early 1820s. Initially, it was used only by doctors and was very expensive. In the 1850s, the hypodermic syringe was invented and an injection of "morphia solution" became famous and widespread. It was considered a quick and effective solution in all cases of severe pain and a cure to many illnesses. Indeed it was also used by the army in Europe and in the US during the 1860s. It became well-known in popular culture and literature too. For example, in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Van Helsing treats Lucy with morphine injections. However, many doctors thought that morphine injections had dangerous side effects, and they should have remained only a strictly medical practice. It was reported that many patients who self-administered morphine became addicted to it. But, ironically, the greatest incidence of habitual

274 H.H. Kane, *Drugs that Enslave. The Opium, Morphine, Chloral and Hashisch Habit*, cit., p.19.

morphine use was among practitioners themselves.[275] By 1909, one-fifth of the mortality in the medical profession was due to 'morphinism' and by 1924, forty percent of doctors were said to be addicted to the opiate.[276]

By 1870s, many doctors started publishing some articles in scientific periodicals whose aim was to warn that "injections of morphia, though free from the ordinary evils of opium eating, might, nevertheless, create the same artificial want and […] a restlessness and depression of which it was itself the cause".[277]

As the 1870s progresses, Europe began to recognise morphine addiction as a true disease. It was given the name of 'morphinism' or 'morphinomania' and the treatment of addiction became a new medical field in which doctors specialised.[278]

At the beginning of the XIX century, opium started to be associated to the Orient, especially because in the familiar Oriental travellers' tales, it was usually stated that people in the East were used to eating or smoking opium, indeed most of the opium used in Britain came from Turkey. The popular association between the Orient and the opium-use was enhanced by famous literary works like S.T. Coleridge's "Kubla Khan or A Vision in a Dream", an incomplete opium-inspired poem and Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions*. Indeed, the opium-dreams of which De Quincey talks about in his essay, are mostly 'set' in the Orient, especially in China. This Country is described as a violent and mysterious land. Maybe such description highlights a growing sense of British rivalry with China, culminating in the two Opium Wars, which broke out because of China's attempt to suppress the British opium trade, since it created a problem of widespread addiction and consequent serious socio-economic crisis in the Country.[279] They were fought from 1839 to 1842 and from 1856 to 1860.

275 B. Milligan, "Opium in the Nineteenth Century", cit., pp. 247-251.
276 B. Milligan, "Morphine-Addicted Doctors, the English Opium-Eater, and Embattled Medical Authority", in *Victorian Literature and Culture 2005 Vol.33 No.2*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p.541.
277 C. Allbutt, "On the Abuse of Hypodermic Injections of Morphia", in *Practitioner 5*, 1870, p.329, quoted in B. Milligan, "Opium in the Nineteenth Century", cit., p.249.
278 B. Milligan, "Opium in the Nineteenth Century", cit., pp. 249,251.
279 *Ibid*. pp. 252,253.

De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* changed opium's popular status from a respectable and useful medicine to a mind-altering drug, responsible of proto-psychedelic visions. This essay and its sequel "Suspiria de Profundis" were an instant success and they never went out of print for all the XIX century. In his essay, De Quincey harks back to the "literary tradition of self-incrimination", that goes back as far as the fourth century with St.Augustine's *Confessions*, but maybe a closer model for the English author was Jean Jacques Rousseau's posthumously published *Confessions*.

De Quincey's essay was widely read during his lifetime and it was very influential. French Symbolists were extremely fascinated by it, indeed in his "Artificial Paradises", Charles Baudelaire dedicates a whole section to De Quincey's *Opium-Eater.* In the US, Edgar Allan Poe took inspiration from it for his tales of terror, in which he clearly uses the De Quinceyan style; confessional first-person narrators who often admit their opium use. In the twentieth century, De Quincey influenced the Beat Generation authors: the surreal heroin-induced visions in William S. Borrough's *Naked Lunch* (1959) strongly resemble De Quincey's Oriental-like opium-dreams.

In the nineteenth century, this essay was widely discussed among the Medical Community members. Many doctors stated that De Quincey's personal experience was paramount to know more about this issue.[280] Indeed in *Uncle Silas*, Doctor Bryerly suggests Maud to "read the 'Opium-Eater'"(243) to understand better her uncle's addiction. However, other practitioners, like H.H. Kane thought that De Quincey's work may have encouraged people to use opium; "such a book […] would create a longing and open the way to a road that has a certain ending in a life's bondage".[281] Nevertheless, he called his programme to cure opiate addiction "De Quincey Home Method".[282]

De Quincey's *Opium Eater* is certainly the most important nineteenth-century

280 B. Milligan, "Introduction to *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*", cit., pp. xiii,xvii,xxx,xxxiii-xxxv.
281 H.H. Kane, *Drugs that Enslave. The Opium, Morphine, Chloral and Hashisch Habit*, cit., p.33.
282 B. Milligan, "Introduction to *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*", cit., p.xxxi.

literary work on drugs, however it is not the only one. There are indeed many pieces of literature that deal with this topic. An example is Bram Stoker's tragic first novel *The Primrose Path* (1875), where the Irishman Jerry O'Sullivan moves to London with his wife and children to find a better job and start a brand new life. However, in London he starts drinking heavily with some dissolute colleagues. Eventually, he becomes an alcoholic and in a fit of rage, he kills his wife and, when he becomes aware of what he has done, he commits suicide.

A short story that deals with drugs and addiction is Arthur Machen's "Novel of the White Powder" (1895). A law student begins to suffer from anxiety attacks after long study sessions, so a doctor prescribes him a white powder, which is probably cocaine. Initially, the boy feels better and gains weight, but after a while his temperament and body change, and he eventually becomes an atavistic shapeless creature, which cannot talk anymore, but only roars.

Another very famous tale that symbolically deals with this topic is Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). Dr. Henry Jekyll tests on himself a mind-altering drug that allows him to separate his rational, socially acceptable side from his wicked, impulsive side and to choose either one or the other. Like a typical addict, Jekyll is convinced that he can get rid of Hyde whenever he wants, but he eventually cannot control his shape-shifting anymore. Hyde has not only a monkey-like shape, like the hallucination of Le Fanu's Reverend Jennings, but he is also described as a "spirit of hell" and a "fiend", so a "spiritual monster", that is the way in which addicts were seen at that time.

Sheridan Le Fanu was interested in this topic too. In some of his short stories and novels, he talks about experiences with psychoactive substances and its consequences. Unlike other more dissolute authors like the aforementioned Baudelaire, Poe or De Quincey, Le Fanu was never reported to regularly take opium or other drugs. However, he was used to drinking green tea to intensify his creative powers and to stay awake at night to keep working, studying and maybe to try to reach that spiritual world

Swedenborg talks about. Therefore, it is not by chance that the protagonist of "Green Tea", Reverend Jennings, takes huge quantities of green tea to keep on working and reading until late at night. After a while, the excessive use of this substance leads him to moral and mental ruination. He starts suffering from paranoia and visual hallucinations, indeed he is haunted by a devilish monkey.

Even if to contemporary readers it might seem strange, in the nineteenth century green tea was said to provoke restlessness, disturbances of sight and psychosis. According to De Quincey, it can also cause states of drunkenness and, as opium, it can open the 'inner eye' and allow people to access a metaphysical world. Dr. Hesselius never denies the existence of the monkey demon and he states that green tea has wretched the protective boundaries of the Reverend's mind, so he can access to another world, otherwise invisible.[283] This tale seems to have partially been inspired by the *Confessions* too,[284] indeed Le Fanu read this essay,[285] so he knew that in his visions De Quincey was "hooted at, grinned at, chattered at by monkeys".[286]

The link between psychoactive substances and mind-expansion is also analysed in Le Fanu's short story "The Room in the Dragon Volant". A young naïve Englishman falls in love with a mysterious Countess. He is so blindly in love that decides to escape to Switzerland with her even if she is already married and he barely knows her, and to give her his wealth, jeopardising in this way his honour. One day she slips in his wine a drug called Mortis Imago, which means the death of illusion. Because of this drug, his mental faculties are enhanced and he is finally able to realise that he has behaved foolishly.[287]

In *Uncle Silas*, Le Fanu deals with the topics of addiction and mind-altering substances too. Some characters take drugs regularly. Alcohol is used both by primary

283 B.M.Hammack, "Phantastica: The Chemically Inspired Intellectual in Occult Fiction", cit., pp 84,85,89,90,91,97.
284 J. Walton, *Vision and Vacancy. The Fictions of J.S. Le Fanu*, cit., p.49.
285 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.24.
286 T. De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, London, Penguin Classics, 2003, cit., p.81.
287 M.H. Begnal, *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, cit., p.42.

and secondary characters. Silas is said to suffer from “delirium tremens”(250), his wife “was every evening tipsy in bedroom”(160), the murdered Mr. Charke often goes to bed “very tipsy”(162) too, and a former servant Tom Driver is called “Old Gin”, because he “was always in liquor”(216). In addition, it is interesting to notice that Dudley is “addicted to drinking”(349), like his parents. This stresses the fact that addiction is often a hereditary condition. Nineteenth-century doctors were already aware of this, indeed Max Nordau in his *Degeneration* (1892) states that children of drinkers and smokers inherit a natural craving for “artificial invigoration”.[288]

As said before, Madame de la Rougierre is an alcoholic. As soon as she comes to Knowl, she begins to steal liquors and she asks for them many times, pretending she needs them to restore her health. Indeed Maud states that she is often drunk:

> She was in one of her boisterous and hilarious moods, and there was a perfume of brandy. […] And all the time […] her bony face grinning and flaming with the 'strong drink', in which she delighted. She sang twaddling chansons […] under such exhilarating influences in a vapouring mood. (391)

Moreover, alcohol may be the reason why she is so moody and quick-tempered and the cause for her violent behaviour. Maud says that when she drinks, she becomes aggressive:

> She [Madame] was a person who could […] drink a great deal without exhibiting any change from it but an inflamed colour and furious temper. (432)

In the novel, there is also an interesting reference to another popular nineteenth-century drug; diethyl ether, which is an anaesthetic drug that causes delirium and hallucinations. Ether is quoted in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1869), when the Countess Rostova's sitting-room is said to smell of Hoffman's drops, i.e. ether. Moreover, in the 1900 Jean Lorrain's surreal tale “Les Trous du Masque”, the protagonist takes this drug

288 B.M.Hammack, “Phantastica: The Chemically Inspired Intellectual in Occult Fiction”, cit., p.88.

and starts having dreadful visions.

Something similar is narrated in *Uncle Silas*. After a hysterical fit, Maud is given Silas' ether. This substance, which the heroine naively calls “restorative”, makes her hallucinate:

> When I came to myself […] I did not know where I was. I thought my father was ill, and spoke to him. […] Madame was seated beside me, and an open bottle of ether, one of Uncle Silas's restoratives, on the table before me.
> 'Who's that – who's ill – is any one dead?' I cried.
> At last I was relieved by long paroxysms of weeping. (393)

However, the novel mostly focuses on Silas' opium and laudanum use and its consequences.

When Maud comes to Bartram, Milly tells her that her father sometimes is 'queerish'(226) and 'silly'(196). Initially, Maud thinks that this means 'foolish', but then she realises that it is the household's way to describe a laudanum trance.[289] This condition can even last “two or three days and nights together”(226)and it makes him act weirdly, as Milly recounts:

> 'One day he sent for Pegtop all the way to the mill; and when he came, he only stared at him for a minute or two, and ordered him out o' the room. He's like a child a'most, when he's on one o' them dazes'. (226)

Readers immediately infer that Silas is addicted to opium, a deduction that is soon confirmed. Maud asks Mary Quince if she knows the cause for Silas' crisis and she informs her that “he takes a deal too much laudlum”(231). Silas takes opium “in laudanum, […] in water, and most dangerous of all, he takes it solid, in lozenges”.(290)

As stated before, drug-users were often portrayed as fiends, revenants and ghosts,[290] so Silas' addiction may be another reason why he is always described as a spirit and in

289 V. Sage, “Notes”, cit., p.462.
290 B.M.Hammack, “Phantastica: The Chemically Inspired Intellectual in Occult Fiction”, cit., p.89.

an ever-lasting state of decay. Indeed Louis Lewin, an early twentieth-century practitioner, wrote that "the morphinist exhausted by the burden of the drug […] is nothing more than a ruin".[291]

Because of his excessive use of opium, Silas risks his life many times. After having been "at death's door for hours"(287), his personal doctor visits him and tells Maud that her uncle has fallen into a coma:

> 'An overdose of opium; you know he takes opium habitually. […] I've known people take it to excess, *but* they all were particular to *measure*, and *that* is exactly the point I've tried to impress upon him. The habit, of course, you understand is formed, there's no uprooting that; but he won't *measure* – he goes by the eye and by sensation. […] Opium, as no doubt you are aware, is strictly a poison; a poison, no doubt, which habit will enable you to partake of, I may say, in considerable quantities, without fatal consequences, but still a poison; and to exhibit a poison *so*, is, I need scarcely to tell you, to trifle with death. (290)

This passage highlights even more Silas' self-destructive tendencies. His doctor says that he does not pay attention to the quantity of opium he takes, as if he did not care about his life. Eventually, this self-destructive habit leads him to self-annihilation. He dies of "an excessive dose of laudanum […] administered by himself".(441)

In the novel, Le Fanu seems to provide the same 'moral' of "Green Tea". Talking about her uncle's health, Dr. Jolks tells Maud that "if the patient won't co-operate it can't possibly end satisfactorily"(289). Similarly, Dr. Hesselius states that "if the patient does not array himself on the side of the disease, his cure is certain".[292] Indeed both Silas and the Reverend are "on the side of the disease"; they do not really try to face their illness and to improve their life quality, but they are both victims of their self-destructive tendencies.[293] Jennings uses green tea to keep on working till late at night, neglecting

291 L. Lewin, *Phantastica: A Classic Survey on the Use and Abuse of Mind-Altering Plants,* Rochester VT, Park Street Press, 1998, p.52, quoted in B.M.Hammack, "Phantastica: The Chemically Inspired Intellectual in Occult Fiction", cit., p.91.

292 J.S. Le Fanu, "Green Tea", ed. Michela Vanon Alliata, Venice, Marsilio, 2017, p.146.

293 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.189.

rest and sleep, Silas uses opium to escape from his fatal condition of old, isolated outcast and to chemically open his “inner eye and power of intuition for the vision and mysteries of our human nature”,[294] so his aim is to escape from reality and reach a new occult world. However, Silas is eventually condemned, because his attempt to go beyond the human mind's limits through chemical means is a kind of “moral fraud” and “a short cut to enlightenment” that transgresses the Christian values of fortitude and discipline,[295] so he is symbolically 'sentenced' to death.

2.5.4. Religion and Heresy

Religion played a fundamental role in Le Fanu's life. However, the author's relationship with it was very conflictual and it was a great source of concern for him. As stated before, the author's ancestors were cut off from society because of their Huguenot religion and his family belonged to a Protestant Irish minority, which was regarded with suspicion and was discriminated by the Catholic majority. In addition, Le Fanu did not easily adhere to his father's Protestant creed, because it did not sufficiently satisfy his existential answers. This is why he was so interested in occultism and alternative religious theories, like Swedenborgianism. Moreover, Le Fanu connected religion to the greatest trauma of his life, his wife's religious psychosis and her consequent death, an event that marked him for his entire life. Nonetheless, religion and faith were very important topics for him. They are ever-present in his works, both in his short stories and in his novels, in which many characters are men of Church or occultists, like Father Purcell, Emmanuel Bryerly, Dr. Hesselius and Reverend Jennings.

In the 1872 collection “In a Glass Darkly”, Le Fanu's religious anxieties are clearly expressed, already from the title. The name of this collection comes from a passage of St.Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians: 'For now we see through a glass darkly; but

294 T. De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, cit., p.8.
295 B.M.Hammack, “Phantastica: The Chemically Inspired Intellectual in Occult Fiction”, cit., p.93.

then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (13:12). However, the collection's title does not convey the epistle's optimistic massage, instead, at a certain extent, it reminds more of a pre-Zarathustrian announcement of the death of God. Le Fanu refers only to the first part of this St. Paul's sentence, in order to point out that reality is only knowable through the darkened glass, but it is not possible to see it clearly, i.e. it is not possible to go beyond the earthly empirical experience and see God and His truth (maybe because He does not exist).

Even before the publication of the "Glass Darkly" collection, the same topic is mentioned in *Uncle Silas*, when Maud tries to look outside the window, but she sees nothing:[296]

> I was obliged to keep my cheek against the window-pane to command a view of the point of debarkation, and my breath upon the glass, which dimmed it again almost as fast as I wiped it away, helped to obscure my vision. (232)

Le Fanu's alteration of 'through' to 'in' in the title of his 1872 collection symbolises the fact that the Bible is now a dubious authority; even if misquoted, its meaning does not change. Le Fanu misquotes, parodies and desecrates the Bible several times in his works.[297] For example, in *Uncle Silas* the housekeeper Mrs Wyat parodies a passage of St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, 15:31: "I face death every day". In the novel, she compares Silas to St. Paul, because of his opium-induced death-like states:[298] "'A dying is he? Well, he be like Saint Paul – he's bin a dying daily this many a day'".(231)

At the same time, Le Fanu precisely quotes and refers to his own works, as if to suggest that his literary works are a more reliable way to express and know himself, than any religious authority. This though highlights Le Fanu's pessimism towards religion, a personal lack of faith and, more generally, the Victorian crisis of faith.[299]

296 W.J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, cit., p.142.
297 *Ibid*. pp. 140,142,143.
298 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.xxx.
299 W.J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, cit., pp.141,143

The collection's short story that better expresses Le Fanu's religious crisis and nihilistic attitude is the aforementioned “Green Tea”.[300] In the tale, Reverend Jennings is persecuted by an ape-like red-eyed satanic demon, which continually interrupts his prayers and services with horrible curses and which incites him to hurt himself and the others. Eventually, the protagonist succumbs to this devilish power and he commits suicide, cutting his throat with a razor. The tragic and nihilistic character of this story is Jennings' utter helplessness; neither Hesselius' help nor the Reverend's prayers can save him. Despite his vast knowledge, Dr. Hesselius cannot stop Jennings' hallucinations and cannot prevent his suicide. Moreover, there is no divine intervention and Jennings feels forsaken by God. Eventually, there is no solution left, but suicide.[301]

In the *Purcell Papers,* religious references and Bible quotations are widely present in all these four short stories. In the 1839 tales, which deal with Satanic persecutions, murders and suicides, Le Fanu's idea of religion is radically different and much more optimistic. There is not the nihilism of “Green Tea” and these tales are characterised by mottoes and epitaphs that highlight the author's moral and doctrinal orthodoxy. For example, the epitaph of “A Strange Event in the life of Schalken the Painter” is a clear reference to Job, chapter 9, verses 32-4. The final sentence of this epitaph says: “Let him […] take his rod away from me, and let not his fear terrify me”. It refers to the fact that the heroine Rose Velderkaust is not afraid of the Satanic demon that appears to her, probably because she has faith in God.

The preface to “The Murdered Cousin” is a clear reference to the Proverbs 1:18-19. “And they lay wait for their own blood: they lurk privily for their own lives. So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain: which taketh away the life of the owner thereof”. This preface refers to the tale's plot, where Emily, the prototype of Maud, whose properties are stolen by her uncle, is a kind of sacrificial victim to human greediness.[302]

300 J. Walton, *Vision and Vacancy. The Fictions of J.S. Le Fanu*, cit., p.50.
301 M.V. Alliata, “Introduzione” in J.S. Le Fanu, “Green Tea”, cit., pp.20,21.
302 W.J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, cit., pp.85,87.

In Le Fanu's novels, the religious theme is of paramount importance. For example, the title of his first novel *The Cock and the Anchor* is a construct of religious emblems; the cock of resurrection and and the anchor of faith.[303]

Of course, in *Uncle Silas* religion plays a fundamental role too. The novel has a dense subplot of Biblical themes, references and direct quotations. Like in *The House by the Churchyard*, in *Wylder's Hand* and in *Guy Deverell*,[304] in *Uncle Silas* Le Fanu metaphorically refers to the topic of resurrection. This is a very important theme, which is ubiquitously present in Anglicanism and comes from the traditional Anglican interpretations of St. Paul's epistles to the Corinthians. Indeed, in those letters, it is written that the buried body rises again on the Judgement's Day, in the shape of an uncorrupted spiritual body. In the novel, there are many forms of symbolic resurrection, for example when Silas wakes from his opium trances, during which he looks dead and when Meg Hawkes recovers from her almost fatal sickness.[305] Moreover, another clear reference to resurrection can be found at the beginning of the novel. Maud recalls an episode of her childhood when, she and an anonymous Swedenborgian, who is later found out to be Bryerly, visit the heroine's mother's grave. He tells her that her mother is not there anymore, meaning that she is with God, but Maud misunderstands his words and thinks she has been brought away. In this passage, the girl unconsciously recalls the Biblical episode of Mary Magdalene's visit to Christ's sepulchre and her puzzlement in seeing his empty tomb:[306]

> 'Oh, *is* mamma taken away? Where is she?' […] I was uttering unconsciously very nearly the question with which Mary, in the grey of that wondrous morning on which she stood by the empty sepulchre, accosted the figure standing near. (23)

The reappearance of the same settings and dead characters in the second part of the

303 *Ibid*. p.92.
304 *Ibid*. p.90.
305 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.xxviii.
306 *Ibid*.

novel may be read as another form of resurrection. After Austin's death and Maud's transfer, Knowl is left uninhabited and abandoned. However, later in the novel, it 'resurrects' and becomes Bartram-Haugh, which is very similar to Maud's native home; it is big, isolated decaying and haunted. Moreover, Austin symbolically comes back to life in the shape of his double Silas and Madame de la Rougierre, who is sent away from Knowl, returns to Bartram as a *révenante*. However, these resurrections seem to mock St. Paul's teachings, because these characters do not come back as morally uncorrupted; Madame acts even more wickedly than before and Austin becomes the vicious and evil Silas. The uncle's name overthrows and mocks religious authority too. Maud's vicious, wicked and greedy uncle has the same name of St. Paul's assistant in the Acts of the Apostles, who symbolises instead a good, faithful Christian man.[307]
The titles of some chapters remind to resurrection too. For example, the chapter where Meg Hawkes is ill is called 'A Friends Arises'[308] and the section where Bryerly tries to warn Maud against Silas is called 'Doctor Bryerly Reappears'.

Beyond resurrection, there are many references to Biblical characters. For example, at the beginning of the novel, the Swedenborgian compares death to “Hagar's eyes […] opened in the wilderness”: this is an allusion to an episode of the Genesis, where Abraham's mistress Hagar is banished to a wild land.[309] Later in the novel, when Monica advises Austin to get married, she tells him that he has “come to the age […] when men *are* swallowed up alive like Jonah”(71). Here, Maud's cousin refers to the famous Biblical passage, when the Hebrew prophet Jonah is swallowed up by a whale.[310] Moreover, when the adult Maud thinks about her uncle's “white face of scorn and anguish”, she feels as if “the Woman of Endor had led [her] to the chamber and showed [her] a spectre”(269). In the Bible, The Woman of Endor is the witch who conjures the

307 W.J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, cit., p.142.
308 V. Sage, “Introduction to *Uncle Silas*”, cit., p.xxviii.
309 V. Sage, “Notes”, cit., p.448.
310 *Ibid*. p.453.

figure of the prophet Samuel.[311]

In the novel, there are references and quotations of Biblical episodes too. For example, Dr. Bryerly talks to Maud about the Deluge, i.e. the Flood, from which Noah and his animals are saved by God's ark. Again, in that passage, the Swedenborgian states "I am washed – I am sprinkled"(318); this reminds to Ezekiel 36:25 "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean from all your filthiness".[312]

In *Uncle Silas* St. Paul is quoted throughout. When Maud is entrapped in Bartram and hopelessly waits for her death, she sees herself already as a phantom and considers the onlooking stars as unsupportive witnesses. In this passage, she refers clearly to the St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews:[313]

> I went in and stood, a phantom at the window, looking into the dark quadrangle. A thin glimmering crescent hung into the frosty sky, and all heaven was strewn with stars. Over the steep roof at the other side spread on the dark azure of the night this glorious blazonry of the unfathomable Creator. To me a dreadful scroll – inexorable eyes. The cloud of cruel witnesses looking down in freezing brightness on my prayers and agonies. (431)

> Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. (Hebrews 12:1)

Dr. Bryerly mentions this passage too:

> Remember, then, that when you fancy yourself alone and wrapt in darkness, you stand, in fact, in the centre of a theatre, as wide as the starry floor of heaven, with an audience, whom no man can number, beholding you under a flood of

311 *Ibid*. p.468.
312 *Ibid*. p.471.
313 W.J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, cit., pp.88,89.

> light. […] Remember to walk as being in the light, surrounded with a cloud of witnesses. (133)

When talking to Monica, Silas refers to St. Paul's "preference of love – the principle that abideth"(396). This recalls, once again, St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity". In this passage of *Uncle Silas*, Le Fanu refers to the literal Greek translation of *agape*, which is not translated as 'charity', but as 'love'.[314]

Beyond canonical Biblical references, there is also an allusion to the apocrypha. When Monica talks to Maud about a clergyman who "lost his heart" to Milly, she ironically states: "I dare say he'll preach next Sunday on some of King Solomon's wise sayings about the irresistible strength of women"(276). Here, she refers to the Wisdom of Solomon; the apocryphal work, in which Wisdom is considered a feminine personification of God.[315]

Moreover, Le Fanu alludes to Paganism too. When Maud meets Madame for the first time, she compares her to an "Eleusinian priestess"(27), i.e. a woman celebrating the Eleusinian Mysteries, the Ancient Greek cult of the Goddess Demeter.[316] Since Maud is fervently religious and superstitious, she immediately connects Paganism with evil and heresy, therefore the fact that she associates Madame to a pagan priestess, stresses even more Maud's fear of her and the governess' wickedness.

Similarly to "Green Tea" and unlike "The Murdered Cousin", *Uncle Silas* analyses the "nightfall" of the Anglican faith, and more generally, the Victorian religious crisis. In the novel, characters seem abandoned to themselves; there is not a providential divine God who guides them out of danger. Indeed, despite her prayers and her faith, Maud is completely left alone and is not able to discern good from evil, God from Satan.[317] Her only 'guide', whom she blindly trusts, and whom she even compares to

314 V. Sage, "Notes", cit., p.474.
315 *Ibid*. p.469.
316 *Ibid*. p.449.
317 J. Walton, *Vision and Vacancy. The Fictions of J.S. Le Fanu*, cit., p.61.

Christ, is an old debauched man, who tries to kill her. At the same time, she portrays Bryerly, who is a good, Christian figure, as an evil spirit. Her confusion highlights the great period of religious instability which characterised the 1840s, when the novel is set.

With the 1829 Catholic Emancipation and the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts of 1831, which allowed religious minorities to practise their religious beliefs in public and to enter in public offices and universities, Anglicanism's authority was dangerously threatened, especially in Ireland. Moreover, in the 1840s, many dissident confessions came to light and widespread. However, these new forms of religion were considered heresies,[318] therefore society split in religious factions.[319]

The Anglican faith's crisis and the social division are portrayed at the very beginning of *Uncle Silas*, where Maud talks about Austin's conversion to Swedenborgianism. It is described a general prejudiced attitude towards this religious confession, on which a great part of the novel's Gothic rhetoric is based:

> My father had left the Church of England for some odd sect […] and ultimately became a Swedenborgian. […] So the old carriage brought my governess, when I had one, the old housekeeper, Mrs. Rusk, and myself to the parish church every Sunday. And my father, in the view of the honest Rector who shook his head over him – 'a cloud without water, carried about the winds, and a wandering star to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness' – corresponded with the 'minister' of his church, and was provokingly contented with his won fertility and illumination; and Mrs. Rusk, who was a sound and bitter churchwoman, said he fancied he saw visions and talked with angels like the rest of that 'rubbich'. (11)

Beside Swedenborgianism, which will be better analysed in the next chapter, in the novel some other dissident confessions are mentioned.

Talking to Madame, Dudley refers to a “Quaker [girl] with a babby on each knee”(44). Quakers, which are also called the Religious Society of Friends, are a Puritan Calvinist

318 V. Sage, “Introduction to *Uncle Silas*”, cit., p.xxvi.
319 V. Sage, “Notes”, cit., p.446.

sect, which was founded by George Fox in 1652, under the Cromwellian Commonwealth. Quakers struggle to yield their self-will to God's judgement and illumination, therefore they follow a strict code of conduct, which rejects frivolous behaviours and trivialities.[320] For example, they all dress in the same way with simple dresses and they cannot drink alcoholic beverages.

Towards the end of the novel, Maud compares her uncle Silas to "the honoured head of John Wesley"(435). The latter is the founder of Methodism, a strict Protestant Dissenter sect, which initially tried to reform the Anglican Church from within, but it eventually turned into an autonomous Church. Methodism is based on strict moral precepts, similarly to the Quakers.[321] In this passage of *Uncle Silas*, the analogy between the pretended saint, i.e. Wesley and the evil Silas highlights once again Maud's orthodoxy, indeed she thinks that these confessions are devilish heresies.[322]

In the novel, Le Fanu also deals with the aforementioned issue of the Tractarian influence on some members of the Anglican Church, which severely threatened the Establishment's authority. The curate talks to Maud about the Rev. William Fairfield, who "while fighting against the Dissenters […] hotly engaged with the Tractarians". (115) The Tractarians were a group of High Church members with Catholic tendencies, who argued for the re-integration of some old Christian precepts, which had been abolished by the Anglican Church. Their name came from a series of doctrines and practises, known by the name of "Tracts for the Time". Today, this movement is called Anglo-Catholicism. This name means to underline the historical continuity of the Anglican Church with the Catholic Roman Church.[323]

320 *Ibid*. p.450.
321 "Methodism", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, [accessed 04.02.2021], https://www.britannica.com/topic/Methodism .
322 V. Sage, "Notes", cit., p.476.
323 "Anglo-Catholicism", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, [accessed 04.02.2021], https://www.britannica.com/event/Anglo-Catholicism .

Chapter III: Emanuel Swedenborg

3.1. Swedenborg's Life

Emanuel Swedenborg was and still is today a quite controversial figure. Halfway between genius and madness, his innovative religious speculations, grounded on the union between faith and science, mystical religion and secular thinking, questioned Christian precepts and gave life to a brand new way to conceive Heaven, Hell and the world itself. Since he claimed to talk to angels, spirits and to have visited Heaven and Hell, he surely was ridiculed. However, his thought influenced many authors and intellectuals and was fundamental for the development of many modern disciplines like psychology.

Swedenborg was born on the 29th of January 1688, in Stockholm. He was the second son of the Protestant Bishop Jesper and Sarah Behm Swedberg, a very religious couple who lived in Uppsala. Here Swedenborg spent seventeen years of his life, until his father was called to preach in Skara. Emanuel lost his mother when he was a child, so after the father's moving, he went to live with his sister Anna and her husband Eric Benzelius, until his university graduation in 1709. In the following year, on Benzelius' advice, Swedenborg left for England to get in touch with the modern English Empiricist and Enlightenment environment and to learn natural sciences. Here he came in contact with modern scientific theories and studied mathematics and astronomy with important astronomers like John Flamsteed and Edward Halley. In this period he studied hard to seek a means to find the longitude at sea, which he eventually found and published in a treaty in 1718.

During his time abroad, Swedenborg also went to France, Holland, and Germany to

study and learn. He especially focused on mathematics, which was his main interest. He attended public lectures, visited these Countries' best libraries and he also met some of the best academics of his time.

In 1715 Emanuel came back to Sweden. Now aware of Empiricism's limits, he realised that senses cannot grasp the totality of human nature and life purpose, therefore we 'grope in the dark' of our unknown condition.

The purpose of life and the best way of living were questions that started obsessing Swedenborg.

Shortly after his return, Swedenborg started a journal called *Daedalus Hyperboreus,* which was dedicated to scientific inquiry. The magazine's aim was to encourage readers to reflect on such matters, but only six issues were published, because it was not very successful. Despite its commercial failure, the journal was intellectually innovative and it was the foundation of the current Royal Society of Sciences of Uppsala.

After this unsuccessful attempt, Swedenborg was discouraged and frustrated because he was not able to find a way through which he could 'serve' Sweden. However, in 1716, he was appointed Extraordinary Assessor of the Board of Mines by King Charles XII. Moreover, in 1720, which marked the death of his beloved stepmother Sarah Bergia, though a very painful experience for him, provided him the financial resources he needed to start a career as a scholar. So, he decided to leave his Country to make his research, write and publish. He came back to England, visited France, Italy, Austria-Hungary, Germany and Holland, where he realised his new works, written between 1719 and 1721: *Chemistry; New Observations and Discoveries Respecting Iron and Fire* and *A New Method of Finding the Longitude of Places on Land and at Sea, by Means of the Moon*.

Unfortunately, two years later Swedenborg had to come back to Sweden to attempt his duty as assessor, because the Country was living a difficult economic situation. In this period some of his memorials on economics were read in the House of Nobles, so his expertise in this field was finally recognised. He remained active in this job until

1747, when he decided to give it up, despite the King's displeasure.

During these years as a public employee Swedenborg did not neglect his philosophical pursuits: in this period he focused even more on his research, especially on what he thought to be the utmost philosophical and theological problem: the relationship between God and the sensible world. From 1724, he investigated and wrote on this problem. In 1734, he published in Leipzig his first work *Philosophical and Mineralogical Works* and in Dresden *The Infinite and Final Cause of the Creation* was released, while between 1740 and 1741 *The Economy of the Soul's Kingdom* came out in Amsterdam.

After these fruitful years, in 1743, he lived a deep spiritual crisis, during which he had recurrent nightmares and visions. He started thinking that pursuing a personal and critical way to understand religion and metaphysics, like he did in his writings, estranged him from God's way and precepts. So, he convinced himself that only if he became absolutely devoted to God, he could have kept on his pursuits. Therefore, he decided to put aside his philosophical enquiries and to dedicate all his life to spiritual matters. However, as time went by, he slowly became more and more obsessed with his studies, until one day God Himself revealed and talked to him. Indeed he said he "heard the Lord calling"[324]

In his *Journal of Dreams,* he states:

> I saw also in vision that fine bread on a plate was presented to me; which was a sign that the Lord Himself will instruct me since I have now come first into the condition that I know nothing […] first to be a child and thus be nursed into knowledge, as is the case with me now.[325]

This was not only a sporadic episode: Swedenborg had visions and heard voices for

324 J.K. Williams-Hogan, "Swedenborg: A Biography", in *Swedenborg and his Influence*, ed. E.B. Glenn, J.E. Brock, cit., pp. 3-5,7-11,14,15.

325 E. Swedenborg, *Swedenborg's Journal of Dreams 1743-1744*, ed., William Ross Woofenden, translated by J.J. Wilkinson, New York, Swedenborg Foundation Inc, 1977, no. 265, quoted in J.K. Williams-Hogan, "Swedenborg: A Biography", cit., p.14.

most of his life. In another occasion, while having dinner, he saw a mist and, all of a sudden, many different animals appeared on the ground. In a corner he saw a ghostly man, surrounded by a shiny light. The following night this ghost reappeared and told him he was God and he had come to dictate him the real meaning of the Bible, in order to spread it. Swedenborg also reports that in that moment his 'inner eye' opened and he could see Heaven, Hell and the realm of spirits, where he could speak to angels and to the ghosts of recently departed people. Moreover, at night, he was heard reciting monologues, claiming he was talking to bad spirits.[326]

In his collection of Swedenborg's works, Jung, reports that the mystic allegedly had a vision of Christ in 1744 and it was so vivid that he could describe it extensively.
In addition, he clairvoyantly saw objects and events he had no previous knowledge and it seems he had mediumship powers, since it is said he talked with the dead.[327]

According to the psychoanalyst Edward Hitschmann, there is a simple explanation for Swedenborg's visions. He suffered from "religious paranoia", a pathology which already 'planted his seed' during Emanuel's childhood. He grew up in a very religious family and when he was a child, his father had "mystical ideas", which he used to explain and teach to his son. Moreover, Swedenborg himself reports that as a child, his parents used to tell him that angels could speak through him. So, his pathology seems to be the "fulfilment of infantile narcissistic megalomania".[328]

Because of this new desire to "serve the Lord", Swedenborg saw no need to stay abroad and he returned to Sweden in 1745, definitely abandoning his projects and research. For the following two years, he kept on working for the College of Mines, but at the same time, he methodically studied the Bible, reading it in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. In this period, he wrote a Biblical Index, a four-tome explanation of the Bible and

326 E. Hitschmann, "Swedenborg's Paranoia", in *American Imago, Vol. 6, March 1949*, Baltimora, The John Hopkins University Press, 1949, pp. 46,47.
327 E. Taylor, "The Appearance of Swedenborg in the History of American Psychology", in *Swedenborg and his Influence*, ed. E.B. Glenn, J.E. Brock, cit., p.164.
328 E. Hitschmann, "Swedenborg's Paranoia", cit., pp. 45,46,49.

his experiences from the spiritual world, which he said to have visited, but all these works were never published.[329]

In April 1745, he heard a divine calling, which told him to detach from worldly matters and to explain to humankind the real meaning of the Holy Scriptures, so he decided to give up his job at the college.[330] After his resignation, Swedenborg focused all his attention to his Divine mission. Doing so, his Biblical knowledge deepened and *Arcana Coelestia*, his first theological work, was published. In the eight-volumes *oeuvre*, the author tries to unfold the *Genesis*' hidden meanings, which he allegedly was allowed to see. For example, he stated that the *Genesis* is not really about Lord's glorification and human's first creation but rather on the creation of their spiritual being.

After the *Arcana Coelestia,* published between 1749 and 1756, Swedenborg released other eighteen theological works from 1749 to 1771. Indeed he believed that part of his Divine mission was to faithfully write, publish and spread the truths the Lord revealed him.

However, he neither aimed to become famous nor to force anyone to convert, this is why all of these works were published anonymously. He maintained his anonymity for ten years, until something extraordinary happened. In 1759, while attending a dinner party in Göteborg, he said there was a fire in Stockholm, which is three hundred miles away. The news was said to be true and Emanuel gained a reputation as a clairvoyant and he became quite famous. Gradually, his books became known in Sweden and the people who read about his 'psychic' power, guessed that he was the author. He kept on publishing anonymously for a while, but then in 1769, he acknowledged his authorship.[331] As he gained notoriety in the intellectual circles, he became a controversial and discussed figure, mostly because of his mystic visions. In his later books, he insisted that his visits to Heaven and to Hell and his conversations with spirits

329 J.K. Williams-Hogan, “Swedenborg: A Biography”, cit., p.15.

330 I. Jonsson, “Swedenborg and His Influence”, in *Swedenborg and his Influence*, ed. E.B.Glenn, J.E. Brock, cit., p.41.

331 J.K. Williams-Hogan, “Swedenborg: A Biography”, cit., pp. 15-18.

and angels were real, not inventions of his imagination. Because of these statements, many people whom he talked about the visions "smiled and shook their heads in distrust or compassion", believing that he was mad, but others trusted him and were very fascinated by this new way to see the Bible and Christianity.[332]

In 1771, Swedenborg published *The True Christian Religion*, which represents the culmination of his mission. He left Amsterdam, where this work was released and he went to England. Here, he suffered a stroke in December of that year and he eventually died on the 29th of March 1772,[333] at 84.

Despite his new, revolutionary ideas, only very few people believed in his theories. However, the London Swedenborgian group, called the Theosophical Society Instituted for the Purpose of Promoting the Heavenly Doctrines of New Jerusalem was very strong. Their ideas gradually attracted some small groups from France, the US, Germany and Sweden. Moreover, In the 1780s, Swedenborg's theories spread even more and Swedenborgianism became a new Protestant dissident confession, the New Church of Jerusalem. However, Swedenborgianism did not prevail. It lacked the social 'dignity' and the political influences that the other dissident movements had. So it was considered a fringe occult sect.[334] Today, the New Church of Jerusalem, is still active. Swedenborgian sects are to be found all over the world, especially in North America.

3.2. Swedenborg's Theology

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the theological debate was in turmoil. Until that moment, Christians followed the Medieval Scholastic interpretation of God and of the afterlife. But during the Enlightenment, this way of conceiving religion was put in discussion. Protestant intellectuals and theologians wondered what

332 I. Jonsson, "Swedenborg and His Influence", cit., p. 30.
333 J.K. Williams-Hogan, "Swedenborg: A Biography", cit., p.19.
334 C. Garrett, "Swedenborg and the Mystical Enlightenment in Late Eighteenth-Century England", in *Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 45, No.1 (Jan.- March. 1984)*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984, pp.69,81.

type of life virtuous departed lived before the Apocalypse. Some thought that souls rested in their graves until the Last Judgement, others believed that they immediately entered into Heaven or Hell. Moreover, the rejection of the Catholic idea of purgatory was a severe problem for Protestant theologians, because there was not a place that smooths the soul's entrance in Heaven or in Hell. And if such place does not exist, how can souls be purified by their earthly sins?

In this period, there was also a process of Christianity secularisation, during which the Theocentric Scholastic conception of religion was superseded by the Anthropocentric model. According to this new interpretation, God was still the focus, but the human earthly life and its joys were not entirely condemned as sinful.[335] So, nature was not a "source of temptation" anymore, but instead, it "was perceived as being intrinsically good".[336]

One the greatest pioneers of this modern idea of Christianity was precisely Swedenborg. His thought was considered at the same time a "product of the Enlightenment" and a reaction against its blind trust in reason. Indeed he organised his religious belief using a scientific method, even if his speculations were almost entirely based on his personal experiences. With his idea of the union between reality and appearance, spiritual and earthly world,[337] his rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity, which he thought to be a "polytheistic heresy" and his conviction that Christ was not the son of God, but the human reincarnation of God Himself, Swedenborg revolutionised the whole idea of Christianity. It is not by chance that the foundation of his New Church is said to coincide with the "second coming of the Lord".[338] Swedenborg's thought also helped the popular rediscover of some Platonic ideas, which the Platonic school preserved in England. Moreover, he was considered an early precursor of Romanticism

335 B. Lang, "Glimpses of Heaven in the Age of Swedenborg", in *Swedenborg and his Influence*, ed. E.B. Glenn, J.E. Brock, cit., pp. 309-311,314.
336 *Ibid*. p.314.
337 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.173.
338 I. Jonsson, "Swedenborg and His Influence", cit., p.42.

and he influenced various authors like Blake, Goethe, Emerson, Tennyson, Yeats[339] and, of course, Le Fanu.

3.2.1 Living in a Spiritual World

One of Swedenborg's most revolutionary theories was the closer connection between the world of the living and the dead. He did not believe in a gap between the earthly and the spiritual worlds. As the lack of difference between Knowl and Bartram-Haugh show, which symbolise the earthly and the spiritual dimensions,[340] these two worlds are symmetrical, they are not divided by any temporal, spacial or metaphysical difference, because they are 'superimposed'. This is the reason why in the preface of *Heaven and Hell* Swedenborg states that for thirteen years he could come in contact with "life in the other world". These two dimensions are the 'mirror' of one another, therefore after death, the soul of the departed, which enters in the spiritual world, experiences no radical change in his/her lifestyle and personality,[341] and everyday experience of reality. For example, in the unearthly dimension there is a shining sun, just like in the Earth. However, it is a spiritual sun, whose warmth is God's love and wisdom.[342]

Because of such deep similarity between the two worlds, Swedenborg explained that there is virtually no difference between living humans and spirits, indeed some dead do not even realise they are not alive anymore.[343] This might be another reason why in *Uncle Silas* the recently departed Austin and the ghostly-like Silas are identical.

So, if neither the living nor the dead know the difference, how can one distinguish between

339 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.173.
340 See 3.4.
341 B. Lang, "Glimpses of Heaven in the Age of Swedenborg", cit., p.312.
342 I. Jonsson, "Swedenborg and His Influence", cit., p.42.
343 B. Lang, "Glimpses of Heaven in the Age of Swedenborg", cit., p.312.

humans and spirits, living men and women and angels?[344] The body is indeed simply the physical clothing of the inner spirit. Only through the spiritual, inner sight it is possible to be aware of "the essential continuity between life and death".[345]

Since these dimensions are so closed and similar, one influences the other. So, in Swedenborg's psychology, knowledge is innate in the soul, which is the human spiritual side and belongs to the spiritual world. Such theory was better developed after 1745, when his "spiritual sight was opened". He stated that body organs belonged to nature, i.e. to the wordly dimension, the rational mind (*mens rationalis*) is part of the spiritual dimension, while the soul (*anima*) is at a intermediate place between the two.[346]

3.2.2 Heaven, Angels and the Destiny of the Departed Soul

At the time of death, souls leave their material body and they can walk freely.[347] They can reach the spirit world and immediately associate with their own kind, until they are ready to enter to Heaven and become angels. In this spiritual world, angels take these spirits to parks and gardens to "delight their outer senses".[348] While they stay in this dimension, which is situated in the middle between Heaven and Hell, angels encourage them to examine their own past lives and their inner reality. Only in this moment humans' true characters and deeds are revealed.[349] Thereafter, the ones who could 'see' inside themselves and understood the angels' teachings are ready to go to Heaven. While the ones who failed to 'see' inside themselves and to understand their mistakes cannot receive the angelic instructions, and they can only enter to Hell.[350]

344 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.186.
345 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.xxviii.
346 I. Jonsson, "Swedenborg and His Influence", cit., pp.38,39.
347 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.xxviii.
348 B. Lang, "Glimpses of Heaven in the Age of Swedenborg", cit., p.313.
349 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., pp.178,179.
350 B. Lang, "Glimpses of Heaven in the Age of Swedenborg", cit., p.313.

According to Swedenborg, the natural order of creation is not disturbed by an original sin, in which he did not believe, but it is spoiled by individual sins of people who choose their ego over God's love. Sinners' lives are accompanied by evil spirits, emissaries from Hell.

The Lord always offers His love and wisdom to struggle against evil, but since human freedom is unassailable, God cannot force people to love Him and to follow His path to Heaven. So humans' souls are free to choose "the society of spirits with which he [or she] feels in harmony".[351] If someone evil attempts to enter to Heaven, even if he/she does not belong there, they willingly cast themselves out, God does not force anyone.[352] This is another revolutionary aspect of the Swedenborgian thought; he radically detaches himself from the orthodox Christian belief of a definite final judgement. According to the Swedish theologian, God does not decide of spirits' destiny, but it is the deceased him/herself, who chooses where to spend eternity. Thinking that God judges souls and decides to destine people to Hell means to underestimate God's goodness and humankind's freedom. Indeed Swedenborg really believes that men and women are free agents, capable of their own decisions, even after death.

Swedenborg's conception of Heaven is very innovative too. For him, this dimension is 'anthropocentric'. He thought that only a "thin veil" divide it from Earth, because life in Heaven is considered a continuation and a fulfilment of the earthly existence, indeed Paradise is not a distinct space, but it can only be perceived by those who looked inside themselves and have become "spiritually aware" of who they truly are.[353] Something similar happens to the Swedenborgian Bryerly and to the adult Maud, who, at the end of *Uncle Silas*, are eventually able to perceive a hidden and wondrous dimension through

351 I. Jonsson, "Swedenborg and His Influence", cit., pp.42,43.
352 R.W. Rix, "In Infernal Love and Faith: William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell"*, in *Literature and Theology, June 2006, Vol. 20, No.2,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, p.113.
353 B. Lang, "Glimpses of Heaven in the Age of Swedenborg", cit., pp.309,313.

their inner eye.[354] The spiritual self-knowledge process is called by Swedenborg 'spiritual rebirth' and consists in making the worship of God and the help of one's neighbour the primary goals in life.[355]

Heaven is not just a spiritual dimension, but it also has a material aspect, apt to "delight the senses", which are not perceived as a sinful material characteristic, which must be rejected, but they are part of the heavenly eternal life. Consequently, Swedenborg rejects those ascetic religious systems that preach a complete spiritual life and he was sceptical about the "world-renouncers", who only meditate on God, like the Catholic St. Francis.

His idea of Paradise stresses Swedenborg's scientific training. He talks about a 'mechanistic' metaphysical dimension, which is made of matter. Moreover, he describes it with the "odd, dry precision" of an engineer, rather than a mystic. However, the conception of a material Heaven is not an invention of Swedenborg. It harks back to the seventeenth and mid-eighteenth century European idea of Heaven, which was grounded on an optimistic attitude towards earthly life. According to this view, in Paradise there are all the luxuries of city life, like good music, theatres, gardens and conversations, and is also possible to reunite with family, friends and religious figures. Such version of Heaven circulated also through Catholics.

However, Swedenborg stresses even more on the sensuous character of Paradise. For him, in Heaven there is room for marriage and even for sexual intercourses. While other eighteenth-century theologians intended 'love' only as love of God, filial affection and charity, Swedenborg thought that marriage love is the most important feeling, since it symbolises Christ's love for his Church. If on Earth marriages are often arranged because of financial or social reasons, in Heaven spirits get married only because they sincerely love each other.

If in Swedenborg's idea of Heaven, there are elements of the Enlightenment and the Baroque

354 See 3.4.

355 G.L. Baker, "Limits of Knowledge: The Mechanics of Ignorance", in *Swedenborg and his Influence*, ed. E.B. Glenn, J.E. Brock, cit., p. 194.

culture, in his idea of 'heavenly' marriage, it can be recognised the typical Romantic idealisation of love and relationships. Moreover, his opinion on marriage challenges both the eighteenth-century idea that wives' role was only to provide a good social status and enjoyment, and the religious perspective that condemned sexual drives as appetites caused by Adam's sin.[356]

If Heaven is not a different, detached dimension from the worldly one, therefore angels must be humans. Unlike any traditional theological theory, Swedenborg thought that angels are not divine, asexual creatures, but are "sexually differentiated" beings, who once were living adults. These people, through their path of self-awareness in the spiritual world, during which they chose "innocence over self-pride", became angels.

Although some angels live a solitary life and others are sent to Earth to become guardian angels, Swedenborg found out that they live in three different communities, depending on their spiritual state. In the Natural Heaven, angels sometimes suffer from their "lack of spiritual capabilities", but their obedience to God saves them from desperation. In the Spiritual Kingdom, angels are always practising Christian charity, while in the Celestial Kingdom, they are so spiritually 'developed' that they can be close to God.

According to Swedenborg, the (stereotyped) lifestyle of the African Countries resemble the way of life of the Celestial Kingdom. Angels are perfectly innocent and uncorrupted, they live in a spontaneous and primitive way, completely naked and naïve. In fact, as these creatures progress spiritually, they do not become more sophisticated, but childlike. Such vision seems compatible with certain Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophical ideas, like the Myth of the Good Savage and with a general Enlightenment's tendency to reject the Baroque artifice, frills and idle entertainment.

356 B. Lang, "Glimpses of Heaven in the Age of Swedenborg", cit., pp. 309,313,315-317,319,328-330,332,333.

3.2.3 Reality and Illusion

In the *Genesis*, it is told that God planted two trees in the Garden of Eden; one gives life to the eater, the other spiritual death. However, according to Swedenborg's new reading of this text, the first tree symbolises the true essence of life, while the other represents human perception of reality, which is mediated by senses. So, it is clear that right from the beginning, a problematic dichotomy had to be faced: if the true essence of reality cannot be grasped by senses, then what are the 'images' that appear to our sight? Are they an utter deception or do they project a faithful version of reality, though not in its essence? What is the difference between reality and illusion?

Swedenborg thought that the only one Reality is the Divine Truth, which is infinite and permanent. Like Arthur Schopenhauer and much Hindu philosophy, Swedenborg believes that anything that is not permanent cannot be real. However, human mind is finite, so men and women can only see reality's ever-changing 'appearance', not how it really is, because its essence is "*within* the created form". So, whatever they know about life is limited and less real than Reality in itself, i.e. the One only Reality.

People have a falsified understanding of the self too. Even if the self is perceived in motion, as a constant flux of ideas, images, thoughts and feelings, the real self is unchanging. Moreover, it strictly depends and belongs to God, though it is experienced as a total personal and independent dimension. This wronged idea of the self is called by Swedenborg the 'proprium', which is extremely close to the modern 'ego'.

Along with the categories of space, time and materiality, the individualised personality is a human illusion, which hides and veils the only Divine Reality. Only when someone has reached the angelic state can 'lift the Maya veil' and experience reality as it truly is.[357] Indeed in *Uncle Silas* Bryerly is not deceived by Silas. Maud's

357 M.W. Stanley, "Appearance and Reality in the Relationship Between Finite Soul and Infinite Source", in *Swedenborg and his Influence*, ed. E.B. Glenn, J.E. Brock, cit., pp. 279-285,287.

Guardian Angel knows from the very beginning that her uncle is evil, because he can perceive reality without its deceptions.[358]

The 'proprium' hides one's real, inner self, which is "the Lord in him". Like the Spiritual Reality, which is hidden by the worldly dimension, the soul, which is veiled by the mortal, human shape has God in itself. However, Swedenborg carefully distinguishes between Lord Himself and His reflection in the forms of life created by Him. God does not 'reside' in His creations, but His energy gives them life.

So, if God is inside men and women, why are they deceived by their fallacious, finite nature?

God gives humankind the senses and the sensuous faculties, which lead them to the perception of a falsified reality. But the Lord does not make them believe in illusions, in fact they choose to do so. Doing so, they follow their own ego and they separate from God. This decision is the source of all evils. So, it is humans' "sunk" in their own ego, which blinds them to God's reality. Only when it is acknowledged the illusory nature of the proprium's idea of the world, the soul is saved and it can eventually be understood that the idea of a personal independent self is the utmost illusion. In fact, if human self belongs to God, only Him possesses a proprium, a ego.[359]

3.2.4 The Law of Correspondence

It was stated before that it is only possible to experience reality's surface appearance (the phenomenon), but the hidden dimension underneath, i.e. the spiritual reality of things (the noumenon) is not accessible through human senses. Moreover, the spirit is not separated from the matter, but is actually 'enclosed' in it. Indeed "there exists in the material world, a far deeper dimension that a quick glance might reveal".[360]

Heaven and the Spirit World are not detached dimensions from the earthly one, they

358 See 3.4.

359 M.W. Stanley, "Appearance and Reality in the Relationship Between Finite Soul and Infinite Source", in *Swedenborg and his Influence*, ed. E.B. Glenn, J.E. Brock, cit., pp. 281-285.

360 B. Lang, "Glimpses of Heaven in the Age of Swedenborg", cit., pp.313,315,319-321,331.

can only be accessed spiritually, but in fact they really resemble Earth in every particular. Moreover, according to Swedenborg, this enigmatic relation between the infinite and the natural world is perfectly represented by the continuous communication between body and soul in humans.[361]

Such communication and the aforementioned similarities between the spiritual and the natural dimension, which reveal a continuity between the sensible and the metaphysical worlds, are called by Swedenborg 'correspondences'. They are a "vast series of correlations between every feature of the mortal and the natural world and of the future worlds".[362] For Swedenborg, reality is "a tissue of correspondences",[363] a 'symmetrical' dimension,[364] where every natural component hides a spiritual element and message[365] and where everything happens twice: once in the tangible world, once in the spiritual dimension, like in *Uncle Silas*, where events repeat themselves.[366] Moreover, with his law of correspondences, Swedenborg attempts to find a permanent and complete relation between linguistic and non-linguistic reality, words and objects.[367]

Such theory is grounded on a deciphering of St. John the Divine's Book of the Revelations, but the idea of a correspondence between physical and metaphysical worlds is far older. It comes from a Platonic theory, according to which reality and its components are a mimesis of the world of ideas, a metaphysical dimension where lies the real essence of things.[368]

Even if Swedenborg's theory of correspondences is based on a mathematical reasoning and on tangible experience, he states that there are certain types of correspondences that can be perceived only through poetry and mythology, they are called *correspondentia fabulosa*. In this group, there are dreams, parables and myths, in

361 I. Jonsson, "Swedenborg and His Influence", cit., p.32.
362 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., pp. 177,178
363 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.xxviii.
364 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p. 185.
365 I. Jonsson, "Swedenborg and His Influence", cit., p.39.
366 See 3.4.
367 W. J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen,* cit., p.23.
368 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., pp. 177,178.

which marks of a spiritual reality are hidden and the task of our intellect is to decipher them.[369]

However, the law of correspondences does not only concern the relationship between these two worlds. According to Swedenborg, there are also many hidden correspondences among various elements of reality, even the ones which at a first glance may seem extremely different from one another. For example, the tremors of the nerve fibres correspond perfectly to the vibrating string of a music instrument and a tuned string corresponds to the transference of ideas from senses to the mind.[370]

3.2.5 A Very Problematic Thought

Needless to say, Swedenborg's innovative and quite subversive thought was severely condemned as soon as the Swedish mystic's books were released. It was a quite predictable reaction, because his ideas went against some of Christianity's most important doctrines, shared both by Catholics and Protestant, like the Trinity or the sharp distinction between material and spiritual world.

In 1767, in Gothenburg, one year after the publication of *The Apocalypse Revealed*, two Lutheran teachers Dr. Beyer and Dr. Rosen, published a series of sermons, explicitly referring to some Swedenborgian principles in a religious magazine called *Clerical News*. One year after, at a regional clergy meeting in Gothenburg, the Dean of the Church of Grimmaton talked about the 'Swedenborg problem' and he harshly condemned the two teachers' works. He very worriedly insisted that they should immediately be suppressed, because they conveyed a dangerous heresy, which militated against God's word, so these sermons should be put to trial. The following month, the Dean of the church at Seglora submitted a formal request for a theological enquiry to the Consistory of Gothenburg. The Bishop of the Consistory asked to examine the

369 I. Jonsson, “Swedenborg and His Influence”, cit., p.40.
370 *Ibid*. pp.35,36.

works that inspired the two professors' sermons and the target shifted immediately from Beyer and Rosen to Swedenborg. Even if the judge admitted that he never read *The Apocalypse Revealed* entirely, he stated he noted some disagreements with the approved doctrine and he basically condemned it as heresy.

Beyer and Rosen send the Consistory some letters, in which they asked to review Swedenborgianism. Meanwhile, Swedenborg, who had heard of this matter only in April 1769, decided impulsively to initiate a counter suit, but then he changed his mind. Instead, on the 25th of April, he wrote a long letter to the Consistory in which he tried to explain his thought, in order to defend and justify himself. However, in early December of that year, the Consistory judge, Bishop Lambert, referred to the matter as a national problem. This case was received by the Ecclesiastical Committee of the House of Clergy, whose speaker was the Bishop Filenius, the husband of one of Swedenborg's nieces. He immediately confiscated copies of *Marriage Love* and reported the Swedenborgian heresy matter to the King himself. Eventually, all Swedenborg's books were sequestered.

In 1771, the matter was still not resolved and Swedenborg decided to complain about it in the following Diet, which was the main assembly of all the houses of the Swedish Parliament. Swedenborg intended to do so, because he was a member of the House of Nobles, so he had ready access to it. However, he was eighty-three and he never made the journey to the Parliament. He died the following year and the matter dropped.[371]

The heresy trial was not the only difficulty Swedenborg had to endure. One year before Beyer and Rosen's sermons' publication, Immanuel Kant released an essay called *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*. The author aimed at demonstrating that the mystic's speculations were not false, but simply not probable.

However, in his 1948 essay *Swedenborg in Deutschland*, Professor Ernst Benz of the University of Marburg stated that Kant actually criticised so sharply Swedenborg's

371 G.F. Dole, "*True Christian Religion* as Apologetic Theology", in *Swedenborg and his Influence*, ed. E.B. Glenn, J.E. Brock, cit., pp. 346-351.

works, to ruin his reputation:[372]

> A powerful shadow lies on the works of Swedenborg in general, which has obscured the influence of his ideas. It is the shadow of Kant, who in his *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, refers to the complete works of Swedenborg as "nonsense", and would banish the spirit-seer to a mad house.[373]

In the nineteenth century, this stigma on the Swedenborgian theories stayed. In the mid-century, when *Uncle Silas* is set, Swedenborgianism was "a live issue" in England. Since the New Jerusalem Church was thought to be totally opposed to the established Protestant teachings, Swedenborgians were left completely alone. In 1854, two Temples of the New Jerusalem were built in Blackburn (Lancashire). This news led to a great scandal and to a so bitter controversy in the local newspaper, that even other dissidents, like the Methodists, turned against Swedenborgians and allied to the Anglicans. From that moment on, any confession, from Protestants to Catholics and Methodist detached as much as possible from Swedenborgianism.[374] Only few tolerant and progressive Methodists and some "mystically inclined" Anglicans were sympathisers of Swedenborg's ideas and willingly accepted them.[375]

372 R. H. Kirven, "Swedenborg and Kant Revisited: the Long Shadow of Kant's Attack and a New Response", in *Swedenborg and his Influence*, ed. E.B. Glenn, J.E. Brock, cit., pp. 103,104.

373 E. Benz, *Swedenborg in Deutschland: F.C. Oetingers und Immanuel Kants Auseinandersetzung mit der Person und Lehre Emanuel Swedenborgs,* Frankfurt, Vittorio Klostermann, 1984, quoted in R.H. Kirven, "Swedenborg and Kant Revisited: the Long Shadow of Kant's Attack and a New Response", cit., pp.104,105.

374 V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., p.xxvii.

375 C. Garrett, "Swedenborg and the Mystical Enlightenment in Late Eighteenth-Century England", cit., p.70.

3.3. Swedenborgianism in Nineteenth-Century Culture

3.3.1. The Romantic Era

Even if in the nineteenth century the Swedenborgian thought was mainly rejected by the public opinion and by many religious congregations, it influenced and interested various authors, artists and intellectuals. Unlike most of Swedenborg and Kant's contemporaries, Pre-Romantic and Romantic authors were less fascinated by the Königsberg professor and admired much more the Swedish mystic. Indeed philosophers like Johann Caspar Lavater, Johann Gottfried Herder, F.W.J. Von Schelling and Friedrich Christoph Oetinger supported his ideas, and composers like Richard Strauss and Arnold Schönberg openly praised them.[376] Moreover, Goethe stated that he was "much inclined […] to believe in a world beyond the visible. [His] own constricted self expands to feel a Swedenborgian spirit world".[377] The German author also stated that only by reading *Heaven and Hell* was he able to finish his famous masterpiece *Faust*.[378] Indeed hidden references to the mystic's thought are to be found everywhere in his work.[379]

But Swedenborgianism's strong influence is to be found especially in the English Romantic authors, like William Blake and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Despite Blake's great admiration of the Swedish mystic, the relationship between the poet and Swedenborg was very troubled. In 1789 Blake and his wife Catherine attended the First General Conference of the Swedenborgian New Jerusalem Church in London. There,

376 R. H. Kirven, "Swedenborg and Kant Revisited: the Long Shadow of Kant's Attack and a New Response", cit., pp.105-107.

377 J.W. Von Goethe, *Briefe an J.K. Lavater,* in *Goethes Werke*, Weimar, Hermann Bölau, 1887-1912, p.213, quoted in R. H. Kirven, "Swedenborg and Kant Revisited: the Long Shadow of Kant's Attack and a New Response", cit., p.105.

378 J.F. Lawrence, "Swedenborg's Trail in the Coleridgean Landscape", in *Studia Swedenborgiana May 1999, Vol.11 No.2.* [accessed 04.02.2021] http://www.baysidechurch.org/studia/default.asp?ArticleID=175&VolumeID=42&AuthorID=60&detail=1 .

379 R. H. Kirven, "Swedenborg and Kant Revisited: the Long Shadow of Kant's Attack and a New Response", cit., p.106.

both of them signed in support of this doctrine, maybe because they were encouraged by Swedenborg's rejection of the traditional ideas of sin and punishment. Blake shared and really appreciated some aspects of the Swedenborgian thought. Like the Swedish philosopher, he interpreted the idea of the 'New Earth', described in Revelation, as an era of new 'spiritual enlightenment', when humanity finally got rid of "religious falsities". Moreover, Blake also believed in the law of the correspondences.[380] But the greatest Swedenborgian influence in Blake is surely the idea of the 'inner eye'. Like Swedenborg, Blake distinguished between the sensorial perception, i.e. the 'physical' capacity of "seeing with the eye" and the imaginative perception of "seeing through the eye", by means of the inner eye with which men and women can grasp true reality, hidden behind its sensorial falsified representation. Through this faculty, it is possible to "communicate directly with eternity" and humans should increase their inward perception to do so.[381]
Such idea was so influential that it can be found in other Romantic authors, like Wordsworth. In his famous poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, the poet talks about memories that "flash upon [his] inward eye".[382]

Despite Blake's fascination with the Swedenborgian theories, his support was brief. Indeed Blake soon realised not to agree with some of the New Church's ideas.
Blake believed in Antinomianism. According to this theory, Christ had abolished all kinds of moral law, so humans were completely free: they did not have to follow a moral code and there were no sins or punishments. It is only necessary to have faith in God to reach eternal salvation. People are guided to the Lord by their "spirit within" and they actively decide to do good actions, like helping their neighbour. In fact, imposed passive rules are totally useless and do not prove one's true faith. At a certain extent, such thought recalls Swedenborgianism and was shared by most of the seventeenth-

380 R.W. Rix, "In Infernal Love and Faith: William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*", cit., pp.111,113,116.
381 R.F. Gleckner, "Blake and the Senses", in *Studies in Romanticism, Autumn 1965, Vol.5, No.1*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965, pp. 1,2,6.
382 W. Wordsworth, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud", in *Poetry Foundation* [accessed 04.02.2021], https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45521/i-wandered-lonely-as-a-cloud .

century radical sects. However, the Swedish mystic insisted on the importance of the fear of an eternal punishment, because it was necessary to easily avoid lusts and vices. Indeed the soul has to be 'spotless' in order to enter to Heaven. It is clear that for Swedenborg Commandments and the Christian moral code are holy, because only if these laws are respected spirits can be given the “divine influx”. For this reason, Blake considers Swedenborg one of those moralisers who “restrain desire”. For Blake, a real “new Heaven” is not made of angels who humbly submit to precepts, but is a place of bodily, spiritual and religious freedom. Blake also said that the Swedenborgian thought promoted the old rhetoric, according to which “the transgressors belong in Hell and proud warriors go to Heaven”. For him, such idea encouraged people to join religious wars against infidelity, which was something that the English poet deeply despised.

Blake also wrote a parody of the Swedenborgian writings called *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. In this work, he debunks Swedenborg's religious authority calling 'Memorable Fancies' the mystic's 'Memorable Relation', which were the name of his visits to the spiritual world. And, using Swedenborg's style of writing, Blake satirically reverses his thought. In Blake's parody, devils are valorised and considered the possessors of true knowledge, while angels are seen as moralists.

Blake also wrote that who desires but restrains him/herself breeds pestilence, which is a satire of the typical religious behaviour of the “virginity that wishes but acts not”.[383]

Unlike Blake, Coleridge always enthusiastically accepted Swedenborgian ideas. Born in the year of Swedenborg's death, he came in contact with the mystic's theories as a teenager. Indeed his best friend, the playwright Charles Lamb lived in a London neighbourhood where some Swedenborgians used to meet.[384] From that moment on, Coleridge seemed to be extremely fascinated by Swedenborg. In one of his first philosophical poems called *Religious Musings*, which he wrote when he barely was twenty-four years old, there are already many references to the New Jerusalem thought.

383 R.W. Rix, “In Infernal Love and Faith: William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*”, cit., pp. 107,109-114,117,119,122.

384 J.F. Lawrence, “Swedenborg's Trail in the Coleridgean Landscape”.

Coleridge's interest in Swedenborg increased in September 1817, when he met Charles Augustus Tulk, one of the founders of the Swedenborgian Society. They became close friends and started a long correspondence, which mostly dealt with the Swedenborgian ideas and German metaphysics. Indeed, in the same year Coleridge published *Biographia Literaria,* in which he explains Schelling's philosophy. It is interesting to point out that in this work Coleridge noticed Swedenborg's influences on the German philosopher and seems to anticipate the views of the aforementioned Swedenborgian scholar Ernst Benz, who stated that Swedenborg was the "spiritual pioneer" of German Idealism.

During his life, Coleridge read many Swedenborgian works such as *The Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, *Heaven and Hell*, and he particularly praised *The Worship and Love of God*, which he considered the proof of Swedenborg's genius.[385] Another sign of Coleridge's great admiration of the Swedenborgian thought is the fact that the poet asked to the London Swedenborgians if he could write a biography of Swedenborg. However, despite the poet's renown, this request was declined.[386]

Because of such admiration, it is not surprising that the Swedenborgian ideas deeply influenced Coleridge's most important works and his theology. Like Blake, Coleridge did not believe in the Empiricist theories of his time, instead he promoted an idealist philosophy based on the theories of Kant, Schelling and Swedenborg.

Coleridge's theological and philosophical theories show an impressive compatibility with the Swedenborgian thought. Like the Swedish thinker, he believed in a direct relationship between people and the Lord, so Popes were useless and irrelevant figures. And, like Swedenborg, Coleridge believed that the First Cause argument was a valid proof for God's existence. The Romantic poet also thought that there was a hidden correspondence between the natural and the spiritual worlds, and through the contemplation of nature, the spiritual world that lies underneath could be grasped and

385 R. Lines, "Things Heard and Seen", in *The Newsletter of the Swedenborg Society, Spring 2000 No.1*, London, The Swedenborg Society, 2000, pp.2,3.

386 J.F. Lawrence, "Swedenborg's Trail in the Coleridgean Landscape".

understood. Moreover, unlike the Empiricists, he stated that the mind is “an active free-will life-force”, not just a passive recipient. Reason, which Coleridge called with the Swedenborgian term 'celestial influx', is an uncorrupted inner light. It constantly communicates and cooperates with the Divine, with which has a “dynamic co-creative relationship”. So, like Swedenborg, Coleridge did not agree with those who predicted an utter detachment from materiality. Indeed in his famous *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the protagonist's disrespect and separation from nature (through the meaningless shooting of the albatross) causes the divine wrath.[387]

3.3.2. Charles Baudelaire

Swedenborg's influence in literature did not certainly stop in the early Romantic period. The Swedish mystic's theories reached France and in the mid-nineteenth century they deeply affected the works and the poetics of many French Decadents and Symbolists, one of all Charles Baudelaire.

Baudelaire probably came in contact with the Swedenborgian ideas through Balzac, while the first reference to Swedenborg is to be found in Baudelaire's satirical prose *La Fanfarlo*,[388] where it is told that the author's alter ego Samuel Cramer has one of Swedenborg's books in his study.[389] In this prose, Baudelaire also refers to the Swedenborgian idea of the love weddings among angels, which he might have taken from Balzac's novel *Séraphîta.*[390]

The aspect of the Swedenborgian thought that Baudelaire appreciated most was the law of correspondences. Even if Baudelaire had a very complicated relationship with Christianity and was certainly not a committed Christian like Swedenborg, the French

387 *Ibid*.
388 “Swedenborg's Influence on Literature” in *The Swedenborg Society*, [accessed 04.02.2021], https://www.swedenborg.org.uk/about-us/about-swedenborg/influence/ .
389 J. McGowan, “Explanatory Notes”, in C. Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, p.352.
390 G. Montesano, “Note ai testi”, in *Charles Baudelaire Opere,* ed. G. Raboni, G. Montesano, Milano, Meridiani Mondadori, 1996, p.1603.

poet believed in the continuous correspondence between natural and spiritual dimensions. He thought that the sensible world can be only perceived with its 'natural obscurity', but through correspondences (which he also called 'analogies') the true nature of things can be accessed. For him analogy is a true science, it is the only way to reach the true knowledge of reality, and imagination is the most important mental capacity, because it allows the mind to perceive how natural and spiritual correspondent elements attract or repulse one another.[391]

The most explicit allusion to this Swedenborgian theory is to be found in *Correspondences*, one of Baudelaire's most famous poems, contained in *The Flowers of Evil*:

Nature is a temple, where the living
Columns sometimes breathe confusing speech;
Man walks within these groves of symbols each,
Of which regards him as a kindred thing.

As the long echoes, shadowy, profound,
Heard from afar, blend in unity,
Vast as the night, as sunlight's clarity,
So perfumes, colours, sounds may correspond.
Odours, there are, fresh as a baby's skin,
Mellow as oboes, green as meadow grass,
Others corrupted, rich, triumphant, full. […] [392]

In Baudelaire's poem nature becomes a symbolic temple, where the correspondences among elements can be grasped. This is explicitly stated in verse 8, which seems to

391 R. Calasso, *La Folie Baudelaire,* Milano, Adelphi Edizioni, 2008, pp.25,26,29.
392 C. Baudelaire, *Correspondences,* in *The Flowers of Evil*, translated from the French by James McGowan*,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, p.19.

recall once again Balzac's *Séraphîta*. In his novel, the French author quotes Swedenborg, when he talks about the complete correspondence between the natural and the spiritual world and when he states that everything is essentially spiritual and 'addresses' the spirits.[393]

In the poem, Baudelaire harks back to a literary tradition, according to which the poet's task is to show and make clear these correspondences, revealing the spiritual significance of things. But according to the critic Jonathan Culler, Baudelaire breaks with this tradition. Baudelaire seems to mock and to demystify the idea, according to which nature is a temple, because each element prove God's glory.[394] Indeed the poet is not able to understand these correspondences either. For him, nature "breathe[s] a confusing speech", which he can only hear through long "shadowy" echoes "from afar". This demystification may also show Baudelaire's pessimism towards human comprehension of the unknown which, at a certain extent, resembles the deep nihilism of Le Fanu's *In a Glass Darkly*.

3.3.3. Henry James Sr.

Swedenborg's influence did not concern only literature, but many more fields, like theology and psychology. One of the most well-known admirers of Swedenborg was Henry James Sr., a theologian, father of the novelist Henry James and the psychologist William James.

James Sr. first came in contact with the Swedenborgian theories during the early years of his marriage with Mary Robertson Walsh. While reading a London periodical called *Monthly Magazine*, James found some articles by J.J. Garth Wilkinson, an English Swedenborgian. Interested and attracted by the ideas outlined in the article, he sent a

393 G. Montesano, "Note ai testi", cit., pp.1527,1528.

394 J. Culler, "Introduction to *The Flowers of Evil*", in C.Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, cit., pp.xxxii,xxxiii.

letter to the author. Soon, the two started corresponding regularly and later they became good friends.

In May 1844, James had a paranormal experience. He allegedly perceived an invisible entity in his room, which, according to him, emanated bad life-threatening influences. He was extremely terrified by this experience and for the following two years he visited various doctors to restore his serenity. One of these physicians sent him to a water-cure establishment in England. There, James met a woman and told her about his experience. She perfectly knew what he was talking about, indeed she told him more about the occurrence and suggested him to read Swedenborg's writings. After the therapy, James went to London and bought *Divine Love and Wisdom* and *Divine Providence*. The theologian read these essays and he was totally delighted and amazed by them. However, his readings did not put in discussion his religious views, because they were totally compatible with Swedenborg's thought. According to William Dean Howells, a late-nineteenth century novelist and a follower of Swedenborg, James was even more Swedenborgian than he.

James agreed with Swedenborg's attempt to apply a scientific method to his theology,[395] believed in the law of correspondence, which "reveals the true and proper way regarding nature"[396] and concurred with the idea that all humans were equal, since wealth did not indicate a spiritual superiority. And, like his Swedish 'master', he rejected the idea of the original sin. Indeed, according to James, if God hated sinners, He would hate humankind and be malignant.

Once back in New York, where James lived with his family, he started reading almost compulsively all Swedenborg's essays and he gave lectures about them in New York City and Boston. After all his readings, through which he convinced himself of Swedenborg's correctness, he devoted his life to the explanation of the mystic's ideas,

395 D. Hoover, "The Influence of Swedenborg on the Religious Ideas of Henry James, Senior" in *Swedenborg and his Influence*, ed. E.B. Glenn, J. E. Brock, cit., pp.265,266,268.

396 P.J. Croce, "A Scientific Spiritualism: the Elder Henry James's Adaptation of Emanuel Swedenborg" in *Swedenborg and his Influence*, ed. E.B. Glenn, J.E. Brock, cit., p.254.

though he had no great success in converting others. At the same time, he started writing theology essays and articles. Some of them were about his own religious views, which were much inspired by the Swedenborgian thought and others dealt with Swedenborg himself, like *No. 1 Letter to a Swedenborgian*, published in 1847 and *The Secret of Swedenborg*, which came out in 1849. These treaties' aim was not just to illustrate Swedenborgian theology, but also to provide a personal interpretations of the mystic's ideas.

Despite James' great interest in the Swedish theologian, he never formally became a member of the New Church of Jerusalem. His children did not become Swedenborgians either, but were very influenced by Swedenborg's thought. Henry James discussed it in *Notes of a Son and Brother*, Robertson, who seemed to be the most interested, studied the Swedenborgian ideas very seriously, and William mentioned them in the aforementioned *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.[397]

3.3.4. The Development of Modern Psychology

In many writings of William James and other psychologists, the name of Swedenborg is mentioned several times. For example Jung stated that the mystic was a very intelligent and learned man and an exceptional visionary. While another American doctor named Beck said that Swedenborg was an extraordinary man, with a special depth of soul and a wide cultural background.

Swedenborg's theories gave a great importance to psychology and some of his ideas helped develop this field and stood at the forefront of the transformation of social and medical sciences.

In May 1844, an article called “Swedenborg on Insanity” was published in the *American Journal of Insanity*, which is nowadays known as the *American Journal of*

397 D. Hoover, “The Influence of Swedenborg on the Religious Ideas of Henry James, Senior”, cit., pp. 267-269.

Psychiatry. In this essay, parts of Swedenborg's diary are analysed. In one paragraph of this diary, he seems to deal with disorders that are currently known as obsession and depression. Swedenborg spoke about the “reflection of thought”, which is the mental image of things. He said there are various “objects of thought” which are used by evil spirits to make men and women fix their attention on them. A prolonged fixation of the mind in a single thought occasions much disturbance and, after a long period of time, the mind can be infested by evil spirits. Moreover, after a while, such fixation provokes melancholic states and such a condition may lead to insanities.

Such lunacies can be of two types: those that are caused by self-love and those that happen when someone allows evil spirits to possess his/her mind. An example of the latter is the case of fixation described above. According to Swedenborg, such insanities give way to dangerous fantasies, which debilitate the person's own spirit. The true enervating aspect of this disease is that such thoughts seem real, but actually they are not. So, the real insanity is not believing in the truthfulness of these fantasies, but in experiencing the contradiction between what seems real and what is truly real.

Swedenborg's psychological theories were not forgotten at the turn of the century. More examples of his theories' influences are found in the works of two pioneers of the personality-social psychology: Gordon Allport and Henry Murray, especially in some essays written in the 1930s and 1940s.[398]

398 E. Taylor, “The Appearance of Swedenborg in the History of American Psychology”, cit., pp. 156-158,163,166.

3.3.5. Nineteenth-Century Spiritualist Movement

Another field that was deeply influenced by Swedenborgian theories was spiritualism and parapsychology.

Nowadays spiritualism tends to be considered a mysterious movement, practised by few people at the outskirts of society. In fact for many Victorians, it was a quite common practice and a way to understand the meaning of life and death and the relationship between humanity and deity, nature and science, materiality and spirituality. Indeed the main purpose of séances and parapsychological techniques was to overcome the limiting binary oppositions between living and dead, present and past, physical and metaphysical, in order to reach the hidden reality that lies beyond and is not immediately perceptible through senses.[399]

Of course such occult practices challenged both the typical Victorian positivist attitude, which was utterly materialistic and blindly believed in the infallibility of senses and scientists' 'delusions of grandeur', which made them think that science and progress would lead humanity to ultimate happiness and perfection. Spiritualists harshly criticised the methods and theories of the 'established sciences', because scientists only focused on the material aspect of reality, excluding the possibility of a hidden dimension, governed by spiritual forces.[400] They opposed to the "gross materialism" of an age when the spiritual dimension was merely seen as a superstition or a delusion.[401] However, spiritualism was not a reactionary movement, which was desperately trying to restore faith and mysticism, erased by a more and more technological era.[402] In fact,

399 T. Kontou, S.Willburn, "Introduction", in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult,* ed. T. Kontou, S. Willburn, London, Routledge, 2012, pp.1,2,4,6.

400 R. Noakes, "The Sciences of Spiritualism in Victorian Britain: Possibilities and Problems", in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult*, ed. T. Kontou, S. Willburn, cit., pp.40,53.

401 A. Owen, *The Darkened Room. Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth Century England*, London, Virago, 1989, p. xvii.

402 C. Ferguson, "Recent Scholarship on Spiritualism and Science", in, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult*, ed. T. Kontou, S. Willburn cit., p.19.

spiritualism had mostly a secular attitude and used the typical scientific experimental method to get in touch with supernatural dimensions. Despite their belief in a spiritual agency, spiritualists somehow internalised the empiricist idea that "nothing exists except matter". So, they urged to provide tangible proofs of spirits' existence through photographies, self-recording cylinders[403] and ultra-red illumination, used to register any change of temperature of séance participants, which would signalise the presence of ghosts.[404] Such evidences were thought to be powerful arguments against sceptics. Most of these sceptics were doctors and scientists. Alienists and neurologists were utterly unsympathetic towards spiritualism, because they thought it was one of the main causes for an "epidemic of mental illness" that was affecting the population.[405] Some doctors, like the psychologist Dr. Henry Maudsley, believed that mediums, believers, religious figures and mystics, including Swedenborg, were mentally unstable 'epileptics', affected by a kind of religious mania. While scientists thought that mediums and spiritualists could not be trusted because they were unable to produce convincing proofs of spiritual activity, so they were seen as "dishonest frauds" and "immoral pariahs". This was a paradoxical situation, because spiritualists based their research on scientific naturalism and rationality, like scientists and doctors themselves. Moreover, many adherents thought to provide tangible and unassailable evidences, therefore they believed science would have supported them.[406]

Despite these harsh critiques, spiritualism was praised and admired by many important personalities. William Thackery, the Trollopes and Wilkie Collins were committed believers,[407] Dickens was devoted to mesmerism, and Elizabeth Barrett

403 R. Oberter, "'The Sublimation of Matter into Spirit': Anna Mary Howitt's Automatic Drawings", in, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult*, ed. T. Kontou, S. Willburn, cit., p.337.
404 R. Noakes, "The Sciences of Spiritualism in Victorian Britain: Possibilities and Problems", cit., p.46.
405 C. Ferguson, "Recent Scholarship on Spiritualism and Science", cit., pp.22,23.
406 A. Owen, *The Darkened Room. Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth Century England*, cit., pp. xv,xvi,xviii,144,145.
407 *Ibid*. p.20.

Browning was a medium herself. She claimed to be able to feel “spirit hands” on her during séances.[408] Sigmund Freud was extremely fascinated by mediumship too. He was a correspondent of the Society for Psychical Research and was convinced that such phenomena needed to be further analysed and that dreams, telepathic experiences, spiritual and supernatural manifestations could not simply be dismissed as frauds or fantasies.[409] Surprisingly, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was a fervent believer too. The 'father' of the brilliant rational detective Sherlock Holmes joined the Spiritual Society after the death of his only son during the First World War, because he wanted to communicate with him. Doyle was so fond of these topics to write some essays about it, like *The New Revelation*, *The Edge of the Unknown* and *The Vital Message*. However, Doyle's belief in spirit communication was not just a reaction to the son's loss. In fact he had always been interested in spiritualism, since in the *Sherlock Holmes* novels there are plenty of hidden references to it.[410]

Spiritualists had very opened democratic ideas. They believed that every man, woman and child, belonging to any social class, had the potential to become a medium. Many spiritualists fought for women's rights and tended to choose women as mediums in séances, because they were thought to have a natural predisposition to mediumship. Therefore, it is not surprising that such movement mostly attracted female believers. In the 1870s, the 'golden age' of English spiritualism, it was very common that women belonging to any social class, age and marital status claimed to regularly contact spirits. Many of them became the circles' intermediaries between the earthly and the afterlife dimensions and they gained notoriety. Some of them became real 'stars' of mediumship. However, despite the circles' progressive ideas, the role and notion of women left unchanged. The female sensitive was thought to be a “spiritually refined” 'angel in the house', an idealised angelic creature, who was able to connect to the “heavenly world”.

408 J. Cadwallader, “Spirit Photography and the Victorian Culture of Mourning”, in *Modern Language Studies Winter 2008, Vol. 37, No.2,* Selingsgrove (PA), Modern Language Studies, 2008, p.20.

409 A. Owen, *The Darkened Room. Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth Century England*, cit., p.237.

410 J. Cadwallader, “Spirit Photography and the Victorian Culture of Mourning”,cit., pp.20,22.

Women were still seen as passive creatures. Their passivity, which was considered the main characteristic of femininity, made women gentler and this facilitated spiritual contacts. For this reason women were seen as the ultimate “channels for Divine communication”.

Women's great importance in spiritualism was clear from the very beginning, since the pioneers of nineteenth-century spirit communication and mediumship were two girls of twelve and thirteen years old: Katherine and Margaret Fox. In 1848 these girls lived near New York in their family home, which was allegedly haunted. Indeed their eight-year-old sister experienced very frightening occurrences there, like inexplicable knockings and noises. After a while, the two elder sisters found a way to communicate with this entity: they established a simple code based on a given number of raps in response to their questions. Soon this story widespread and two years later the Fox sisters became famous and thousands of people started to attempt to communicate with spirits using the 'rapping' technique. In the following decades spiritualism reached Europe and gained a great popularity, especially in England.

Four years after this first American experience, spiritualism reached the UK. It was first introduced by an American woman, Mrs. Hayden. In October 1852, she began to advertise and talk about her abilities as medium and spiritualist. She got instant success and was soon asked to show her abilities at fashionable evening parties. Within a year, numerous spiritualist small groups were formed and spiritualism became so famous that even Queen Victoria and Gladstone tried to communicate with spirits.

However, the place where spiritualism really took hold was in the industrialised cities, among the working classes. Unfortunately, in these polluted and overcrowded cities, bereavement and death (especially of children) was a very common experience. So, spiritualism represented a great source of hope and consolation for many people. It was reported that in West Yorkshire, Manchester, Nottingham, Belfast and Glasgow a great number of spiritualist circles took place in no time and they especially involved people belonging to dissident confessions, like the Swedenborgian church of New Jerusalem.

But such practices attracted also groups of secularists, like David Weatherhead, who in the mid 1850s founded the *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*. As the 1860s progressed, London had a more central role. In these years in the capital, a spiritualist press was established, which published magazines like *Human Nature*, *The Spiritual Magazine* and *The Spiritualist*.

Many of these papers' journalists and contributors were once again Swedenborgians.

As said before, in the 1870s spiritualism and occult practices' popularity was at their peak. This is the decade of one of the most famous English mediums: Florence Cook. At the age of fourteen, she started to suffer from severe trance-like states, which caused prolonged day-dreams, visions and flashes of clairvoyance. Desperate for her child's condition, her mother took her to a spirit circle and it was found out she had great mediumistic capacities and soon she managed to fully materialise a spectre,[411] which was called by the name of 'Katie King'.[412]

Florence Cook was one of the most famous, but she certainly was not the only one. In this period, London brimmed with circles of spiritualists, phrenologists and especially mesmerists,[413] who believed that spirit communication is due to the 'magnetic' or 'mesmeric' fluid that pervades cosmos and allows people of any time, space and dimension to share their thoughts and sensations.[414] Mesmerism was actually fundamental for spiritualism's development, because the latter was deeply influenced by the former; the mesmeric trance became the séance medium's trance and the mesmeric table-turning became the spiritualist table-ripping.[415]

In this decade two main spiritualist societies developed: the British National Association of Spiritualists and the Psychological Society of Great Britain. These were

411 A. Owen, *The Darkened Room. Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth Century England*, cit., pp.xiv,4,5,7,10,18,19,21-24,42,43.
412 R. Noakes, "The Sciences of Spiritualism in Victorian Britain: Possibilities and Problems", cit., p.47.
413 T. Kontou, S.Willburn, "Introduction", cit., p.6.
414 R. Noakes, "The Sciences of Spiritualism in Victorian Britain: Possibilities and Problems", cit., p.32.
415 J.J. Franklin, "The Evolution of Occult Spirituality in Victorian England and the Representative Case of Edward Bulwer-Lytton", in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult*, ed. T. Kontou, S. Willburn, cit., p.130.

neighbourhood associations in which local spiritualists helped and supported one another. These societies were characterised by their open-mindedness, indeed new radical and progressive views were discussed. Many members had socialist ideas and abhorred class distinctions, they criticised the lunacy and divorce laws, wanted the State to improve destitute people's health and education,[416] rejected the established religion and traditional political beliefs, based on the oppression of working classes, women, Africans and Native Americans.[417]

Despite its great success, spiritualism in England declined in the 1880s, mostly because of ideological and personal tensions within the British National Association of Spiritualists and the discovery of many fraudulent mediums disappointed many believers and made them lose interest in spiritualism.[418]

Nonetheless, in 1882 the famous Society for Psychical Research was founded. Its aim was to attain knowledge of afterlife and to study spiritualism, telepathy, inexplicable apparitions and other 'psychical phenomena' using its own scientific interdisciplinary approach.[419] Unlike the spiritualist associations, whose members were only spiritualists and mediums, in the Society for Psychical Research there were many people of science who did not blindly believe in Positivism, like chemists, physicists, biologist, philosophers and psychologists, including William James,[420] who was also president of the society between 1894 and 1895.

Spiritualist groups were called 'circles' and its member 'sitters' because the typical spirit communication technique consisted in sitting together around a table, joining 'mental forces'. Séances usually began with a prayer or some reflections about the spiritual world, then all sitters joined hands and sang to show the spiritual entity that it was visiting a harmonious and peaceful place. Moreover, the linked circle was needed to

416 A. Owen, *The Darkened Room. Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth Century England*, cit., pp.25,26.
417 C. Ferguson, "Recent Scholarship on Spiritualism and Science", cit., p.23.
418 A. Owen, *The Darkened Room. Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth Century England*, cit., p.236.
419 R. Noakes, "The Sciences of Spiritualism in Victorian Britain: Possibilities and Problems", cit., p.38.
420 T. Kontou, S.Willburn, "Introduction", cit., p.7.

maintain an interrupted flow of energy. When sitters felt a cold breeze passing over their hands and arms, they knew a spirit was there with them and they started communicating with it using knocks or raps. Usually one rap meant 'no', two raps expressed doubt and uncertainty and three raps meant 'yes'. Some of the most talented mediums could also give life to spectacular séances, in which spirits played instruments, sent long understandable messages and even materialised. But the more mediums entered in contact with entities, the more exhausted they were and, sooner or later, almost all professional sensitives began to lose their physical and mental vigour and eventually ended up losing their gift.[421]

At the end of the XIX century and at the beginning of the XX century, new spiritual communication methods were invented. In 1890 the famous Ouija boards were created. Undisputed protagonists of contemporary horror films, these boards first appeared during the American Civil War. Since almost every family had lost a relative, boards were meant to console people and help them to cope with sorrow. The name 'Ouija' was allegedly 'chosen' by the board itself and meant 'good luck'.[422]

Eleven years after, in 1901, the Society for Psychical Research investigated a new phenomenon: the automatic writing. During séances, it could happen that sensitives in a trance state wrote cryptic fragmented messages, especially allusions to classical texts, modern poetry and essays, including many Swedenborgian works, or apparently meaningless sentences. Such phenomenon was also known as 'cross-correspondences', because investigators soon realised that such messages only made sense if the communications received by two or more mediums were brought together. Indeed a medium's fragment corresponded and gave sense to the message another sensitive received. In the first decades of the XX century, such messages were considered the

421 A. Owen, *The Darkened Room. Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth Century England*, cit., pp.5,44,45,61.

422 "The Ouija Board's Mysterious Origins: War, Spirits and a Strange Death", in *The Guardian Online*, 30th Oct. 2016, [accessed 04.02.2021], https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/oct/30/ouija-board-mystery-history/ .

ultimate proof of the individual's spiritual existence beyond death because writing represented a material, sensorial proof and a way to provide the immaterial spirit a material shape.[423]

Along with automatic writings, one of the clearest form of 'spirit materialisation' was spirit photography. Such photographs became quite common in the 1870s and were primarily 'souvenirs' of séances and a way to memorialise dead.[424] Spirit photos were considered an 'extension' of the post-mortem photography tradition. But these pictures are even more eerie, because mediums always asserted that they had no control on the spirit appearances, since spectres themselves chose how and when to manifest.

Spirit photography was such a unique and interesting practice that it attracted and fascinated many people, including Arthur Conan Doyle and Alfred Tennyson. Doyle sat for various "spirit portraits" and, despite the general doubts and scepticism of his fellow members of the Society for Psychical Research, Doyle firmly believed spirit photography to be another proof of the existence of afterlife.[425] Like Doyle, Tennyson believed in spiritualism and he tried in many ways to prove it true. Moreover, he was very intrigued by spirit photography and was convinced to have seen the spirit of his beloved departed best friend Arthur Hallam in a photograph.[426]

Like Swedenborgianism, spiritualism's ideas are another demonstration of Victorian Age's crisis of faith in the established religion. Spiritualism radically detached from traditional Christian precepts, but it was rather inspired by Eastern religions, like Buddhism and Hinduism, Egyptian polytheism, Kabbalahism, Platonism, astrology,

423 L. Wilson, "The Cross-Correspondences, the Nature of Evidence and the Matter of Writing", in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult*, ed. T. Kontou, S. Willburn cit., pp.97,98,119.

424 S. Willburn, "Viewing History and Fantasy through Victorian Spirit Photography", in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult*, ed. T. Kontou, S. Willburn, p.363.

425 J. Cadwallader, "Spirit Photography and the Victorian Culture of Mourning", cit., pp.14,17,24.

426 J. Hoffman, "Arthur Hallam's Spirit Photograph and Tennyson's Elegiac Trace", in *Victorian Literature and Culture 2014, Vol. 42, No.4,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp.611,617.

evolutionary science, scientific secularism and Swedenborg's theories.[427] Especially in the UK, many of Swedenborg's notions were popularised and integrated into the spiritualist movement. Indeed Swedenborgianism's 'arcane', 'esoteric' element particularly appalled to certain intellectual and well-educated mediums, like Mary Howitt, Susan Gay and Sophia De Morgan, whose work *From Matter to Spirit* can be considered an adaptation of Swedenborg's philosophy to modern spiritualism. Moreover, despite their refusal of the traditional orthodox doctrine, many spiritualists actually believed in a transcendental Divinity, who guided humankind, and their idea of God usually coincided with the Swedenborgian theory of the 'androgynous Deity', according to which God has both a male and a female side. The former was the Divine Wisdom, while the latter was the Divine Lore. The two aspects of the Divine always co-operate, are inseparable and co-exist in every living being. Spiritualists' belief in this doctrine may be a reason why they willingly accepted female spiritual authority and power. In the US, Swedenborg's ideas of heavenly marriages and spiritual affinity had great resonance and were (mistakenly) identified with 'free love' principles.[428]

Swedenborgianism and spiritualism's aims are basically the same and it can be argued that spiritualism attempted to actualise what Swedenborg theorised. Very similarly to Swedenborgianism, spiritualism is based on the notion that metaphysical dimensions are not utterly unreachable and separated from the world, but they can communicate through physical signs.[429] Therefore, both spiritualism and Swedenborgianism's main purpose was to overcome the traditional idea of an utter separation between the physical and the spiritual world, demonstrating that they do not really differ, but they are intertwined. Indeed the spiritual dimension shapes and influences the material one, therefore matter is not intrinsically dead but is kept alive by its spiritual components. An example of the 'fusion' between matter and spirit was the ectoplasm, which is the

427 J.J. Franklin, "The Evolution of Occult Spirituality in Victorian England and the Representative Case of Edward Bulwer-Lytton", cit., pp.129,131.

428 A. Owen, *The Darkened Room. Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth Century England,* cit., pp. 13,14,21,35,159.

429 J. Cadwallader, "Spirit Photography and the Victorian Culture of Mourning", cit., p.23.

materialisation of a spectre during séances. Allegedly, this entity has a physical body, but when touched, it disappears.[430]

Spiritualists thought that if matter has a great spiritual component, it cannot be disintegrated. So, like Swedenborg, they did not see death as a complete dissolution, but as a change of state. This is why spiritualist inscriptions on graves never refer to somebody's death, but to their 'translation', i.e. spiritual rebirth.

Moreover, as it was analysed before, spiritualists, like the Swedish mystic, claimed that the physical and spiritual worlds always communicate and *correspond* to one another. Some mediums, like Howitt, tried to find a valid fixed procedure to understand the correspondences she thought to be hidden in the drawings she made during séances.[431]

3.4. Swedenborgianism in *Uncle Silas*

The author who was mostly influenced by the Swedenborgian theories was surely Le Fanu. As stated before, the Irish author was deeply interested in Swedenborg's beliefs. After Susanna's death, he dedicated himself fully to them, reawakening in this way his deep interest in occultism and supernatural manifestations, with which he was quite familiar. Indeed in his childhood, which he spent in the rural shire of Limerick, stories of spirit appearances were commonplace. Therefore it is not surprising that Le Fanu strongly believed in spirits,[432] and that he wrote some essays on esoteric subjects, like *Mesmerism* and its sequel *A Few More Words About Mesmerism – the State of Sleep-Walking*.[433]

His earliest source for the Swedenborgian doctrines might have been the article

430 L. Wilson, “The Cross-Correspondences, the Nature of Evidence and the Matter of Writing”, cit., pp.101,103,104.
431 R. Oberter, ”'The Sublimation of Matter into Spirit': Anna Mary Howitt's Automatic Drawings”, cit., pp.342,350.
432 P. Shaw, “Sheridan Le Fanu: Master of the Occult, the Uncanny and the Ominous”, cit., pp.194,195.
433 J. Walton, *Vision and Vacancy. The Fictions of J.S. Le Fanu*, cit., p.6.

"German Ghosts and Ghost Seers" published in *The Dublin University Magazine* in 1841 by Henry Ferris. This piece was probably one of the main inspirations for "Green Tea" too. Indeed the author also reports some weird stories of a green tea-addicted clergyman, who suffered from hallucinations.[434]

Le Fanu started reading many Swedenborgian essays, including *Arcana Coelestia*, *Heaven and Hell* and *The Animal Kingdom*.[435] So, it is not surprising that Swedenborgianism became a central aspect and a *leit motiv* of some of the works Le Fanu wrote during the period of reclusion. His interest in Swedenborg helped convey his works a unique, extremely original character and contributed to bring Swedenborgianism in the Victorian Irish culture.[436]

Even though Le Fanu never formally converted to Swedenborgianism, he firmly believed in some theories of the Swedish mystic. The closest correlation between Le Fanu and Swedenborg lies in the belief that there is no real difference between earthly and spirit worlds, inner and external life, natural and supernatural elements, spiritual and psychological dimensions, since these elements are deeply connected to one another. This is why in Le Fanu's works there is almost no clear difference between supernatural apparitions and rationally explainable events. Moreover, many of his characters are liminal figures, both human and spirit, like Austin Ruthyn, Silas or Madame de la Rougierre.[437]

Like Swedenborg, Le Fanu also believed in the importance of individuals' understanding of their own inner dimension, which coincided with their spiritual dimension. However, such investigation is always dreadful and, in some cases, it is

434W.J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, cit., p.143.

435 D.P. Zuber, "Swedenborg and the Disintegration of Language in Sheridan Le Fanu's Sensation Fiction", cit., p.76.

436 W.J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, cit., p.30.

437 See 2.2 and 2.4

doomed to failure.[438] Indeed some characters, who approach their inner psychological-spiritual world, either die or are not able to understand it.

Despite Le Fanu's admiration for the Swedenborgian theories, he shows a pessimistic attitude towards them, which was probably induced by a natural gloomy temperament, by the loss of faith in religious systems[439] and by the reading of Immanuel Kant's aforementioned *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*. Since in this essay Kant states that human perceptions are limited, so it is impossible to demonstrate neither the existence nor the absence of a spiritual world, therefore Swedenborg's alleged visions of a spiritual dimension cannot be trusted.

The Swedenborgian world in which characters live is not reassuring at all, but it conjures fears and anxieties.[440] Reading a few passages of the Swedenborgian works is enough to unsettle its readers: Jennings states that such texts are "rather like to make a solitary man nervous".[441] Similarly, Maud has to stop reading *Heaven and Hell* because she "grew after a day or two so nervous". (24)

Living in the Swedenborgian reality is a kind of nightmare for Le Fanu's characters, especially for the Swedenborgians. Most of them, from Jennings to Austin and Silas, are tormented, disturbed and depressed. They are cut off from society, incapable of having 'healthy' bonds and relationships with the others. Only few of them, like Dr. Hesselius and Dr. Bryerly, rely on Swedenborg's theories as a supreme source of wisdom, however in many occasions, they must acknowledge these ideas' inadequacy to cope with reality.[442]

So, it is clear that Le Fanu's Swedenborgianism does not 'work' like typical religions, since it does not lead to salvation, but to the utter annihilation and death of the already

438 J.J. Cerullo, "Swedenborgianism in the Works of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu: Desocialization and the Victorian Ghost Story", cit., pp.93,96.
439 W.J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, cit., p.28.
440 A. Milbank, "Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu: Gothic Grotesque and the Huguenot Inheritance", cit., p.366.
441 J. S. Le Fanu, "Green Tea", cit., p.78.
442 J.J. Cerullo, "Swedenborgianism in the Works of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu: Desocialization and the Victorian Ghost Story", cit., pp. 96-98.

fragile characters, which usually is self-inflicted: Jennings commits suicide and Silas dies of an opium overdose. Moreover, in Le Fanu's works, the correspondences and connections with the spiritual dimension are never harmonious. In fact, such correspondences are hermetic, obscure, unverifiable and the characters who try to understand them, jeopardise their lives.[443]

If in Le Fanu's works human attempts to understand the spiritual dimension are usually frustrated, evil spirits always manage to contact and haunt humans. Le Fanu was particularly interested in the Swedenborgian theory, according to which evil spirits attach themselves to the livings with whom they share common vices, or to the ones who unfortunately open a channel of communication with them. The persecuting spirits are many and have various fearful forms. They can have the shape of a shrunken man, like in “The Watcher”, a tatty cat as in “The Mysterious Lodger”, a bestial red-eyed monkey, a crow like in “The Familiar”, an evil ghostly uncle or a seducing vampire, like Carmilla,[444] who mimics Swedenborgian arguments where she states that dying together is the only way to live together.[445] No matter how innocent or guilty victims are, evil always manages to reach them.

Swedenborgianism characterises some of Le Fanu's novels too, like for example *Checkmate*. But if in this work the only real reference to the mystic lies in a character's name 'Emmanuel', it is in *Uncle Silas* that Swedenborg's doctrine plays a fundamental role in the narration.[446]

In *Uncle Silas*, Swedenborgianism is integrated in the novel, through a vast network of symbols. Using symbolic language, Le Fanu wants to show life's ambiguity and nature, which is a 'grove of symbols', many times incomprehensible. But, at the same time, he attempts to decipher them.[447] This is one of the reasons for the novel's great

443 W.J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, cit., p.27.
444 J. Rockhill, “Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu”, cit., p.31.
445 A. Milbank, “Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu: Gothic Grotesque and the Huguenot Inheritance”, cit., p.368.
446 W.J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, cit., pp.27,166.
447 M.H. Begnal, *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu*, cit., p.75.

success and popularity.

It is indeed a mistake to dismiss the role of Swedenborgianism in the text with the simple fact that many characters see it as a heresy.[448] Not only are there evident references to Swedenborgian works and theories, but the very structure of the novel is based on them. Its liminal ambiguous settings, its ghostly dead-like characters, the convergence between life and dead and the systematic repetition of events suggest the presence of a "secondary existence" and the permeation of two correspondent realities,[449] where death and life are intertwined and one becomes the metaphor of the other.[450]

Direct references to Swedenborg and his theories are widely present in the novel. An important evidence of the mystic's 'physical' presence is the fact that all male protagonists dress like him, as if his identity was fractured and scattered in the text. In the mid-century, many biographies of Swedenborg reported that he dressed in black velvet in several occasions.[451] So, it is not by chance that, at the beginning of the novel, Austin is dressed in a "loose, black, velvet coat and waistcoat"(13), Dr. Bryerly is "sheathed in shining black cloth"(134), and Silas is "all in black, with an ample, black, velvet tunic".(200)

The figure with whom Swedenborgianism is frequently associated is of course Dr. Bryerly. He speaks to Monica about his religion, he "leans much on what we call the doctrine of correspondents" and "he is read rather deeply in the writings of Swedenborg, and seemed anxious to discuss some points".(185) Moreover, Maud sees him reading "Swedenborg's account of the other world, Heaven and Hell",(241) and after visiting her uncle, Dr. Bryerly reads her a passage of *Heaven and Hell*, the paragraphs 536-603,[452] which deal with the conditions of the "condemned", corrupted spirits, which are

448 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., pp.6,173.
449 W.J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, cit., pp.69,166.
450 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.191.
451 D.P. Zuber, "Swedenborg and the Disintegration of Language in Sheridan Le Fanu's Sensation Fiction", cit., p.76.
452 V. Sage, "Notes", cit., p. 466.

'doomed' to solitude and isolation:

> 'See here, I was just reading a passage', and he opened the little volume at the place where his finger marked it, and read for me a few sentences, the purport of which I well remember, although, of course, the words have escaped me.
>
> It was in that awful portion of the book which assumes to describe the condition of the condemned; and it said, that independently of the physical causes in that state operating to enforce community or habitation […] there exist sympathies, aptitudes, and necessities which would, of themselves, induce that depraved gregariousness, and isolation too. (244)

Dr. Bryerly also gives Maud (and readers) a real explanation of Swedenborg's doctrine. After Austin's death, he tells the narrator that her father's spirit is no longer in the physical world, but in the spiritual dimension, and that the two are connected by vibrations, which make 'translation' (i.e. resurrection in the spiritual world) possible:[453]

> 'He [Austin] is in his place; I here on earth. He is in the spirit; I in the flesh. The neutral ground lies there. So are carried the vibrations, and so the light of earth and heaven reflected back and forward […] and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. […] Why do you look frightened? Where is your faith? Don't you know that spirits are about us at all times? Why should you be afraid to be near the body? The spirit is everything; the flash profiteth nothing'. […] Remember, then, that when you fancy yourself alone and wrapt in darkness, you stand, in fact, in the centre of a theatre […] with an audience, whom no man can number, beholding you under a flood of light. […] And when the hour comes, and you pass forth unprisoned from the tabernacle of flesh […] you will rejoice. (133)

It is interesting to notice that Dr. Bryerly's belief that "spirits are about us at all times" seems to be proved right at the end of the novel. Maud finds out Silas' true wicked nature, so she manages to open her 'inner eye' and see reality how it truly is, therefore she is finally able to see spirits. However, at the same time, the young heroine's mental state is clearly compromised by her uncle's mistreatments, so she cannot be trusted, therefore the actual presence of spirits cannot be proved:

453 *Ibid*. p.458.

> 'You were always odd, niece; I begin to fear you are insane,' he [Silas] replied, in the same stern, icy tone.
> 'Oh, uncle – oh! – am I? Am I *mad*?'
> 'I hope not; but you'll conduct yourself like a sane person if you wish to enjoy the privileges of one.' […]
> My whole soul was concentrated in my uncle, the arbiter of my life, before whom I stood in the wildest agony of supplication.
> That night was dreadful. The people I saw dizzily, made of smoke or shining vapour, smiling or frowning, I could have passed my hand through them. They were evil spirits. (430)

Despite these explicit references, Swedenborgianism in *Uncle Silas* is mainly implicit and symbolically hidden in the narration, in its characters and events.[454]

The novel is based on four main Swedenborgian ideologies: the symmetrical cosmology, the theory of correspondence, the spiritual world as a place of final judgement and the communication between human and spiritual creatures.[455]

From a Swedenborgian point of view, the passage between the first and the second part of the novel is represented by the two 'journeys': Austin's death and Maud's moving to Silas's. When Maud's father dies, she and Mary Quince leave Knowl, i.e. the earthly dimension, and 'follow' him in the spiritual world, represented by Bartram. Such interpretation has a great importance, because it also affects the novel's temporal structure. Since Swedenborg theorised that these two dimensions are intermingled and almost indistinguishable, the events described in the first and second part of the novel (in the earthly and spiritual world) happen simultaneously.[456] According to the Swedenborgian interpretation, Bartram is a symmetrical dimension, which strongly *corresponds* to the earthly Knowl. Such correspondence is also enhanced by the textual references to St. Paul, both at the moment of Maud's departure from Knowl and when she fears death in Bartram.[457]

454 J. Rockhill, "Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu", cit., p.33.
455 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.179.
456 *Ibid.* p.188.
457 W.J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, cit., p.89.

Silas' mansion is a duplicate of Knowl without its deception, since in the spiritual world everything appears as it really is. But what it is shown in this 'true' reality, is nothing good. Knowl's well-finished aspect and its gardens are just a deceit, because its real aspect is Bartram's: a deserted and neglected place. In the same way, Knowl's familiarity turns into Bartram's dangerousness and corruption.

Knowl's master is Austin, a very solitary, secluded, weird but good man. Such characterisation fits Swedenborg's description of the 'pious recluses': people who renounce the world, giving themselves up utterly to their inner world, and living in a soul-corrupting isolation.[458] In the parallel spiritual reality, Maud meets Bartram's master: Silas, Austin's evil version. This character's wickedness and his plan to rob and murder Maud is not simply a sensational element of the plot, but represent the good father's suppressed and unconscious violent disposition towards his daughter.[459]

Talking about Silas, Monica mysteriously tells Maud that "perhaps other souls than human are sometimes born into the world, and clothed in flesh" (167). Indeed, as the second part of the novel progresses, it is clearer and clearer that Maud's uncle is not human, but rather a shadow or a spectre. Swedenborg thought that after death, souls 'withdraw' from the body. Silas' stupor and trance-like states, which Le Fanu justifies with opium-addiction, are 'symptoms' of such phenomenon, so it explicitly evidences Maud's uncle's ghostly nature. Moreover, Silas' sudden outbursts of rage and blaspheme expressions, are coherent with Swedenborg's description of the evil spirit condition in *Heaven and Hell*, according to which such spectres act foolishly, are blasphemous and plot against the people to whom they attach, exactly like Jenning's evil monkey.

In Bartram, Maud can finally discover her uncle's true nature, which in the earthly world of Knowl was hidden behind the portrait's beauty and charm. However, there is still an unresolved mystery: Austin, like his brother, has a shadow-like aspect and he

458 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.185.
459 W.J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, cit., p.29.

does not seem absolutely real.[460] He is a very liminal figure, at the "borders between shadow and light" and he always appears and disappears from the narration, like a spectre.[461] But if Austin is the double of Silas and the latter is a spirit, why is the former described as a ghost too? Is Austin Silas' human counterpart, or is he another aspect of the same spiritual identity?

The other characters' spiritual versions are less problematic. In the spiritual world, Dr. Bryerly's good nature is revealed, because it is not hidden anymore by the characters' superstitious prejudices. Monica Knollys and Milly, who were little influential in the first part of the novel (in the earthly world) acquire an active, positive role in the spiritual dimension.[462] Moreover, Dudley and Madame de la Rougierre, along with Silas, turn out to be evil spirits, while Dr. Bryerly, Monica and Milly, along with Meg Hawkes and Tom Brice, who eventually help Maud escape, can be seen as guardian angels.

Though secondary characters, Milly and Meg are quite important, because they correspond to Maud's identity and psyche, which seem split in these two characters. Such correspondence is also reinforced by the girls' names, which all begin with the letter 'M', in a kind of "orthographic triptych". Milly and Maud are strikingly alike: both of them have the same hair and eye colour, their fathers are reclusive Swedenborgians and they are motherless. The only difference is that Milly lacks education, and Maud's project is to teach her etiquette and appropriate language. Therefore, it can be argued that Milly is a projection of Maud's will of action, power and self-determination, which is restrained by the rules she is subjected to. Unlike Milly, Meg is physically different from Maud, but corresponds to her for another reason: she "functions as a metonym for the violence that threatens Maud". Indeed, only after witnessing Meg's father's violence on his daughter, Maud becomes aware that there is something wrong with her uncle and

460 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland, c*it., pp.167,179,182,187,188.

461 D.P. Zuber, "Swedenborg and the Disintegration of Language in Sheridan Le Fanu's Sensation Fiction", cit., p.78.

462 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., pp.174,184.

that he has a violent attitude too.[463]

The only character whose nature is not hidden by the earthly world's deceptiveness is Madame de la Rougierre. From the very first time she comes to Knowl, she is perceived as a disturbing outer element, indeed she is not described as human, but as a spectre. She arrives unannounced in the earthly world of Knowl at night, she is “very tall” and looks “nearly white under the moon”,(24) like a shadow. As said before, Maud always refers to her as something unearthly and ghastly: in the spiritual world of Bartram, she mysteriously reappears in an abandoned, decaying side of the mansion, like a haunting ghost. However, since the spiritual and the earthly dimensions are intertwined, it is impossible to distinguish between mortals and spectres, so Madame, a spirit, can hide and live undiscovered in Knowl.

If in the spiritual world people's nature is revealed, their mischiefs come to light too and this allows spirits to acknowledge the mistakes they made in life, since in Swedenborg's vision God does not punish or absolve, but spirits themselves judge their behaviour.[464] In Bartram, it is found out that Madame is a thief and is in cahoots with Silas to plot against Maud, and this attempt to the heroine's life unmasks Charke's murder and Silas' guilt. This makes Maud's uncle aware of his actions and he eventually sentences himself to death. Moreover, in the spiritual dimension, Maud is finally able to look beyond the 'dark glass' and see “face to face”, recognising the difference between her own father and Silas, and by doing so she finally overcomes her naivety.[465]

Another interesting element to point out is that in *Uncle Silas* Le Fanu uses the natural landscape to symbolically refer to Swedenborgianism. After Maud's mother's funeral, the girl is brought to visit the woman's grave by an unnamed, mysterious Swedenborgian, a friend of Austin, who turns out to be Dr. Bryerly, later in the novel. In this occasion, Maud hears about Swedenborg for the first time:

463 D.P. Zuber, “Swedenborg and the Disintegration of Language in Sheridan Le Fanu's Sensation Fiction”, cit., pp.80,81.
464 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.183.
465 A. Milbank, “Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu: Gothic Grotesque and the Huguenot Inheritance”, cit., p.374.

I remember feeling a sort of awe of this little dark man; but I was not afraid of him, for he was gentle, though sad – and seemed kind. He led me into the garden […] with a balustrade, and statues at the farther front, laid out in a carpet-pattern of brilliantly coloured flowers. We came down the broad flight of Cane stone steps into this, and we walked in silence to the balustrade. The base was too high at the spot where we reached it for me to see over; but holding my hand, he said, 'Look through that, my child. Well, you can't; but *I* can see beyond it […] I see a cottage with a steep roof, that looks like gold in the sunlight; there are tall trees throwing soft shadows round it, and flowering shrubs, I can't say what, only the colours are beautiful, growing by the walls and windows, and two little children are playing among the stems of the trees, and we are on our way there, and in a few minutes shall be under those trees ourselves, and talking to those little children. […] So we descended the steps at the right, and side by side walked along the grass lane between tall trim walls of evergreens. The way was in deep shadow, for the sun was near the horizon; but suddenly we turned to the left, and there we stood in rich sunlight, among the many objects he had described.

'Is this your house, my little men?' he asked of the children […]

'You see, now, and hear, and *feel* for yourself that both the vision and the story were quite true; but come on, my dear, we have further to go.' […]

'Sit down beside me, my child,' said the grave man with the black eyes, very kindly and gently. 'Now, what do you see there?' he asked, pointing horizontally with his stick towards the centre of the opposite structure.

'Oh, *that* – that place where poor mamma is?'

'Yes, a stone wall with pillars, too high for either you or me to see over. But […] Swedenborg sees beyond it, over, and *through* it, and has told me all that concerns us to know. He says your mamma is not there'. […] 'Your mamma is alive, but too far away to see or hear us; but Swedenborg, standing here, can see and hear her, and tells me all he sees, just as I told you in the garden about the little boys and the cottage, and the trees and flowers which you could not see, but believed in when *I* told you. So I can tell you now as I did then; and as we are both, I hope, walking on to the same place, just as we did to the trees and cottage, you will surely see with your own eyes how true is the description which I gave you'.

I was very much frightened, for I feared that when he had done his narrative we were to walk on through the wood into that place of wonders and of shadows where the dead were visible.

He leaned his elbow on his knee, and his forehead on his hand, which shaded his downcast eyes, and in that attitude described to me a beautiful landscape, radiant with a wondrous light, in which, rejoicing, my mother moved along my path, ascending among mountains of fantastic height, and peaks, melting in celestial colouring into the air, and peopled with human being translated into the same image, beauty and splendour. (21-23)

When Bryerly looks through the balustrade, he invites Maud to “walk on […] that place of wonders and of shadows where the dead were visible”. Since in the novel characters always move and travel to spiritually altered dimensions, it can be implied that Maud and the Swedenborgian enter into another dimension. Only the man can see it, through his 'inner eye', therefore Maud cannot experience it directly, but she must believe in it. The landscape he describes is an uncorrupted, idyllic, pastoral place, characterised by happy children, warm sunlight, vivid colours and flowers. It resembles the Swedenborgian Heaven. Indeed, according to the Swedish theologian, Heaven corresponds to an earthly garden, with colourful flowers, sunlight and trees.[466]

This scenery is more similar to a dream, than reality. Maud and Bryerly seem to leave back the lifelike Dutch garden, made of 'solid', recognisable landmarks, and they enter a vague, shapeless and undefined dimension.[467] Its dreamlike character is also highlighted by the use of inappropriate word-collocations: the trees have “stems”, not trunks and walls are “trim”. After descending the steps, they come back to the physical world, in which the surrounding landscape is dark and the sun is setting. But, as they change direction, Maud is able to see the very scenery Bryerly saw before. This makes the narration extremely ambiguous, because it suggests that the man is not a real visionary, since Maud can see this landscape too.

Again, when they reach Maud's mother's grave, the Swedenborgian manages to see through it and is able to perceive a celestial, proto-psychedelic landscape, characterised by “wondrous” lights, extremely high mountains and coloured skies, a heavenly world where “translated” people reside. However, because of the aforementioned ambiguity, it cannot be said for sure whether this landscape really belongs to the spiritual world or not, despite the place's clear otherworldly features.[468]

It is also worth to point out that this very scene is enacted again later in the novel, when Maud is a teenager and walks with Madame de la Rougierre to Church Scarsdale's

466 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.180.
467 W.J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters. Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, cit., p.117.
468 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., pp.152,154.

graveyard, a place which Maud fears since her childhood. Unlike Bryerly, who tries to cheer Maud up, talking to her about Heaven, Madame forces her to enter the graveyard and frightens the girl even more with the aforementioned '*danse macabre'*. According to the *Athenaeum* reviewer Geraldine Jewsbury, there is "no dramatic incident" in these passages, "but they serve to shadow forth the struggle between her [Maud's] guardian angel", i.e. Bryerly "and her evil genius"[469], i.e. Madame.

Finally, since Maud lived her childhood and her adolescence in close contact with Swedenborgians, it can be assumed that such ideas influenced her. Indeed at the very end of the novel, in a moving passage, the adult Maud states that she found consolation in religion, after the loss of a child:

> The shy, useless girl you have known is now a mother – trying to be a good one; and this, the last pledge, has lived. […]
> I am thinking – and trembling while I smile, to think – how strong is love, how frail is life; and rejoicing while I tremble, that in the deathless love of those who mourn, the Lord of Life, who never gave a pang in vain, conveys the sweet and ennobling promise of compensation by eternal reunion. […]
>
> This world is a parable – the habitation of symbols – the phantoms of spiritual things immortal shown in material shape. May the blessed second-sight be mine – to recognise under beautiful forms of earth the ANGELS who wear them; for I am sure we may walk with them if we will, and hear them speak. (444)

In this paragraph, not only do Maud's words stress her Christian faith, but she also clearly refers to the Swedenborgian doctrines and texts, and the language used reminds specifically to *Heaven and Hell*.[470]

According to James Walton, in this passage, Austin would speak through his daughter's voice, finally giving her the key to interpret *Heaven and Hell*, and explain her the Swedenborgian doctrines.[471] However, it might also be stated that, after her ordeal and

469 G. Jewsbury, in *Athenaeum,* 7th January 1865, p.16, quoted in V. Sage, "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*", cit., pp. xxix,xxx.
470 V. Sage, "Notes", cit., p.477.
471 J. Walton, *Vision and Vacancy. The Fictions of J.S. Le Fanu*, cit., p.65.

the spiritual apparitions she witnessed in her uncle's room, Maud has opened her 'inner eye'. So, she was eventually able to get rid of all the prejudices, which were instilled in her by Mrs. Rusk and Monica, she might have studied the Swedenborgian texts by herself, and accepted some of its doctrines. Even if there are not enough evidences to assume that Maud has become a Swedenborgian, she clearly does not reject this doctrine, but believes in some of its precepts. Indeed, Victor Sage points out that Maud has evidently abandoned some of her High-Church orthodox positions, to join more eclectic ideas, like the second-sight or the notion that the physical reality is only a shadow of the spiritual realm.[472]

Though in the novel Swedenborgianism has rather a negative connotation, because it is a source of fear and danger, in the finale, it leads to hope and happiness. In the novel's ending, which is the most positive of Le Fanu's fictional conclusions, the adult Maud states that she can see “sweet green landscape and pastoral hills, and see the flowers and birds” (443), in which she accompanies her young son. This passage strongly reminds to the walk she took with Dr. Bryerly, when she was a child. Having faced death, which is symbolically represented by the grave Silas was digging for her in Bartram, now Maud has opened her 'second-sight', and like Dr. Bryerly, she can see beyond the physical limits of perception.[473] For her, this is a source of happiness, solace and spiritual strength, because she can finally realise that the heavenly place Bryerly described her is real.

Swedenborgianism in *Uncle Silas* is a rare and unique case in Le Fanu's literary production, and it differentiates from his other 'Swedenborgian' stories, like “Green Tea”.

In the novel the Swedenborgian theories are an intrinsic part of the narration and of the structure, they are 'hidden', and symbolically integrated in the text, while in the tale there are explicit references to his works and doctrine.[474] “Green Tea” is indeed an

472 V. Sage, “Introduction to *Uncle Silas*”, cit., p.xxix.
473 A. Milbank, “Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu: Gothic Grotesque and the Huguenot Inheritance, cit., p.375.
474 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.185.

"explicitly Swedenborgian tragedy", in which the unfortunate character enters in contact with a "malevolent spirit presence". According to Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia*, such entities seek to enter into a person's body and soul,[475] and if the person they are attached to realises their true nature, these spirits "would attempt by a thousand means to destroy [him/her]; for they hate man with a deadly hatred".[476]

In the two works, Swedenborgianism has completely different values and meanings. In *Uncle Silas*, Swedenborgianism has occult, scaring and dangerous features, but at the same time, it helps Maud understand the true nature of the world around her, losing her naivety and growing up. In "Green Tea", Swedenborgianism is an outer, dangerous element of disturbance, which brings the unfortunate character to madness and death. Like Maud, when Jennings opens his interior sight and comes in contact with evil spirits, his life is jeopardised. But unlike the young heroine, he is completely helpless, and Hesselius, who is Bryerly's counterpart,[477] is utterly ineffectual. With his 'scientific', deductive method, he can analyse physical reality, but he cannot see *through* it. Unlike Bryerly, who with his second-sight can see Silas' hidden wickedness and the spiritual dimension, Hesselius does not manage to overcome the physical world. Being a Swedenborgian, Hesselius knows that humanity is surrounded by spirits, and that Jennings' "veil of the flash […] is a little out of repair", therefore "sights and sounds are transmitted",[478] and he also wrote a treaty called "Essays on Metaphysical Medicine". However, he seems to be quite unqualified. He wants to treat his patient with eau de cologne and he eventually concludes that Jennings "succumbed" to a "hereditary suicidal mania",[479] unable to provide the Reverend the right cure and to make the right diagnosis.

475 J.J. Cerullo, "Swedenborgianism in the Works of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu: Desocialization and the Victorian Ghost Story", cit., p.94.
476 J.S. Le Fanu, "Green Tea", cit., p.72.
477 W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, cit., p.188.
478 J.S. Le Fanu, "Green Tea", cit., p.126.
479 *Ibid*. p.146.

Conclusions

This dissertation tried to highlight Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's important contribution to Victorian Gothic and, more generally, to nineteenth-century literature. Through the analysis of *Uncle Silas*, it was possible to point out the author's originality and the novel's peculiar character.

Uncle Silas was an instant success, it never went out of print and it also inspired theatrical, filmic and television adaptations, showing that this novel still intrigues many people, like in the past. This is not surprising. *Uncle Silas* is not just a sensational Gothic story, but it is a complex blend of styles and genres, from psychological thriller and grotesque comedy to the fairy tale. There are also very complex characters, whose ambiguity and liminality make them unique and unforgettable.

The richness of the novel's content is remarkable. In 400-odd pages, Le Fanu manages to mix "the art of exciting suspense and horror" with the depiction of "contemporary manners and the scenes of common life".[480] Indeed, the novel continuously alternates lifelike landscapes and ordinary characters, who live in modest houses and speak the local dialect, to extraordinary figures: eerie ghostly-like guardians, locked in their haunted mansions and Swedenborgian mystics, who are able to reach hidden, unearthly worlds. Moreover, Le Fanu is always alternating the outer, social dimension with the inner, personal sphere. As already said, he deals with various contemporary topics and issues, from the crisis of Anglicanism to workers' and women's conditions, all filtered through the untrustworthy and deceiving gaze of the protagonist, which is influenced by her thoughts and strong emotions. Such blend is the novel's strength, because it gives the story a very ambiguous character, which makes readers

480 J.S. Le Fanu, "A Preliminary Word", in J.S. Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas*, London, Penguin Classics, 2000, cit., p.3.

wonder whether the events are real or imaginary.

The use of Maud's point of view does not only aim to intrigue readers, but it also allows Le Fanu to discuss his idea of evil. As pointed out in chapter II, in an industrialised capitalist society, ghosts and demons are not scary anymore; the young heroine is not afraid of the spirits that haunt Knowl: they do not disturb her at night and she is used to them. The real evil is ordinary and it is dangerously close, since the people who are supposed to be trustworthy and friendly are an actual menace. The tutors who should educate are totally ineffective, they are unable to provide a good education, and they only instil prejudices that lead to fear. In a money-based, individualist society, guardians become the real uncanny haunting presence, who attempt to their wards' life in order to take their money. And in a positivist, utterly empiricist world, God is dead, religion has become meaningless. Indeed, similarly to Reverend Jennings' case, Maud's cries for help are unheard and no divine intervention is ready to save her.

However, in *Uncle Silas,* there is not that attraction towards nihilism that characterises “Green Tea”. Unlike Jennings, Maud overcomes the wicked threatening forces around her. Overcoming evil also means to overcome fear, biases and to achieve independence. Maud is eventually saved and freed from her uncle's tyranny, she manages to take her life back, to create a family on her own, to get rid of her prejudices and to accept some Swedenborgian theories.

The analysis of Le Fanu's novel also gave the opportunity to discuss and analyse the figure of Emanuel Swedenborg, his interesting religious views and the great resonance his thought had throughout the nineteenth century. Some considered him a delusional madman, others a genial visionary. Nonetheless, Swedenborg's ideas of an enlightened, anthropocentric Christianity distance themselves from the tradition and helped modernise religion. Though only few enthusiasts converted to Swedenborgianism and the Swedish theologian never managed to create a unified church, his ideas are still very influential today. Not only there are many small New Church communities all over the world, but Swedenborg's ideas also inspire Neopagan and New Age religions.

Swedenborgianism's role in *Uncle Silas* is central. It enhances the novel's ambiguous and original character and, at the end, it completely 'reverses' the plot. In Maud's fearful eyes, and therefore in readers' eyes, Swedenborg's theories are perceived as a dangerous, occult and heretic threat, a way to conjure up evil forces. Initially, such misleading interpretation deceives readers. Exactly like Maud, readers consider Austin a victim of Dr. Bryerly, who seems to be a shady, dangerous villain, and Swedenborgianism the cause for the heroine's distress. But in the second part of the novel, the Swedenborgian doctor turns out to be Maud's guardian angel: he is a good, helpful character, who loves Maud and tries to warn her against Silas. Moreover, it is found out that there is nothing wrong with his beliefs.

Unlike in “Green Tea”, Swedenborgianism eventually takes a positive connotation in *Uncle Silas*. It becomes a powerful 'weapon' for Maud, which allows her to finally face the truth and to distinguish good from evil, right from wrong. Only when she manages to open her 'inner eye' and see Bartram's spirits, she acknowledges Silas' wickedness and the real haunting threat, which is reality itself.

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